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1941

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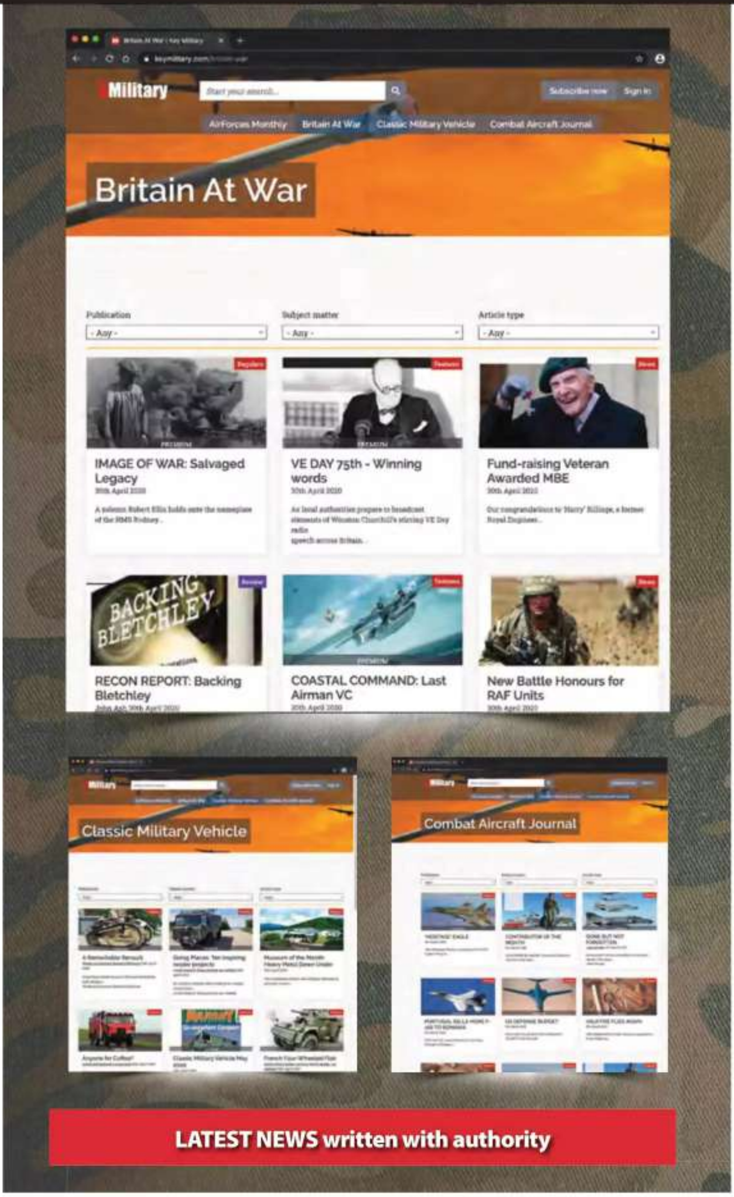

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WORLD WAR TWO
1941

Though Hitler had failed to crush Britain during the summer of 1940, in the early days of 1941, as the Blitz on the UK's towns and cities raged on towards its conclusion with a devastating raid on London in May, he had every reason to feel confident of the Third Reich's eventual victory. However, the 12 months that followed undoubtedly shaped the eventual outcome of the war.

For the early part of 1941, much of the Allies' war effort centred on sustaining Britain's maritime lifelines across the Atlantic – which had so concerned Churchill – or holding the Axis forces at bay in the Mediterranean and North Africa. Then, in June, the Nazi war machine struck east, drawing Stalin's Russia into the conflict.

Having long regarded the Soviet Union as Germany's natural enemy, Hitler had aimed to swiftly destroy the Red Army, sweep up the nation's vast economic resources and acquire the *Lebensraum*, or "living space", he believed the Third Reich needed. The scale of the fighting that followed on the Eastern Front would surpass anything the world had ever seen.

In December, Japan joined the Axis alliance and attacked the United States. The day after the surprise assault on Pearl Harbor – "a date which will live in infamy" as Roosevelt described it – the United States declared war on Japan. The nation that had only months before declared itself to be "the great arsenal of democracy" had joined the Allied cause.

On hearing the news, Churchill later recalled that "being saturated and satiated with emotion and sensation, I went to bed and slept the sleep of the saved and thankful". It could be argued that the events of June and December 1941 marked the two key turning points in World War Two; that the Allied cause, no matter how rocky the road ahead, was assured.

With stories and images representing the fighting on land, at sea and in the air, and of the difficulties on the Home Front, *World War Two: 1941* explores the dramatic events of that year – a period in which World War Two truly became a global conflict.

John Grehan

John Grehan
Editor

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Editor: John Grehan
Senior editor, bookazines: Roger Mortimer
Email: roger.mortimer@keypublishing.com
Design: Dan Jarman
Cover: Steve Donovan
Advertising Sales Manager: Brodie Baxter
Email: brodie.baxter@keypublishing.com
Tel: 01780 755131
Advertising Production: Rebecca Antoniades
Email: rebecca.antoniades@keypublishing.com

SUBSCRIPTION/MAIL ORDER
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Stamford, Lincs, PE9 1NA
Tel: 01780 480404 Fax: 01780 757812
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PUBLISHING
Group CEO: Adrian Cox
Publisher: Mark Elliott
Head of Publishing: Finbarr O'Reilly
Chief Publishing Officer: Jonathan Jackson
Key Publishing Ltd, PO Box 100,
Stamford, Lincs, PE9 1XP
Tel: 01780 755131
Website: www.keypublishing.com

PRINTING
Precision Colour Printing Ltd, Haldane,
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FRONT COVER: Adolf Hitler addresses the Reichstag in 1941. (Heinrich Hoffmann/ullstein bild via Getty Images) and Churchill addresses the joint meeting of Canada's parliamentarians in the House of Commons in Ottawa on December 30, 1941. (National Museum of Denmark) Colourisations by colourisationbyrjm

BELOW: German troops in action during Operation *Barbarossa*, Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union which began on June 22, 1941. (Everett Collection/Shutterstock)

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HMS *Ark Royal* sinking on **November 14, 1941**. (Historic Military Press)

A member of 610 (County of Chester) Squadron's groundcrew is pictured with one of 'A' Flight's Spitfires, in this case that coded 'DW-A', at RAF Westhampnett during 1941 – a time when the aircraft would have been involved in *Circus* sorties. (Courtesy of Mark Hillier)

THE RAF'S FIRST CIRCUS

With the Battle of Britain won, Fighter Command began to switch from a defensive role and adopt a more offensive stance. As Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir Sholto Douglas, Dowding's successor as the head of Fighter Command, noted, "In the middle of December the German fighter force, which had suffered heavy losses since the Summer, virtually abandoned the offensive for the time being. Clearly, the moment had come to put our plans into effect and wrest the initiative from the enemy."

Douglas was far from alone in holding such views. Though retired, Marshal of the Royal Air Force Hugh Trenchard made his presence felt at the Air Ministry in November 1940, urging that the RAF should "lean towards France", that it should go on the offensive. The RAF would, claimed Trenchard, win the resulting battle of attrition.

The result was outlined by Douglas in his post-war despatch: "Broadly speaking, the plan which we now adopted visualized two kinds of offensive operations. In cloudy weather, small numbers of fighters would cross the channel under cover of the clouds, dart out of them to attack any German aircraft they could find, and return similarly protected. In good weather fighter forces amounting to several squadrons at a time, and sometimes accompanied by bombers, would sweep over Northern France. The code-names chosen for these operations were respectively *Mosquito* (later changed to *Rhubarb*, to avoid confusion with the aircraft of that name) and *Circus*; but in practice it was necessary to restrict the name *Circus* to operations with bombers." The latter were intended to lure enemy fighters into the air so that they could be engaged by RAF fighters in battle.

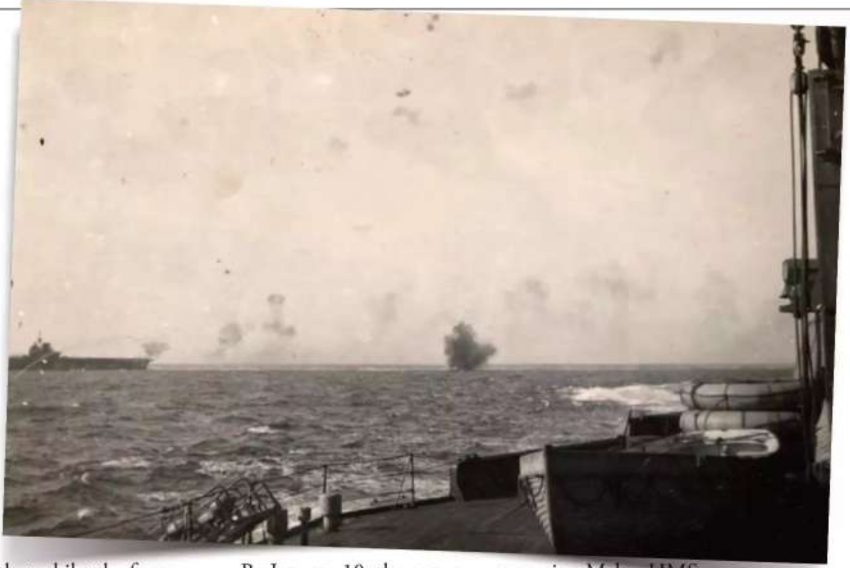
A Stirling Mk.I of 15 Squadron pictured during *Circus* No.33 on July 5, 1941, the target of which was a steelworks in Lille. Note the bursting anti-aircraft fire. (Historic Military Press)

Providing valuable experience, the *Rhubarbs* patrols began on December 20, 1940. It was not until January 10, 1941, that *Circus* No.1, was undertaken. No less than nine squadrons of fighters escorted six Bristol Blenheims of Bomber Command's 114 Squadron to attack dispersal pens and ammunition dumps on the edge of the Forêt de Guînes, to the south of Calais.

The squadron's Operations Record Book takes up the story: "The first six aircraft… took off from Hornchurch to keep rendezvous at 6000ft with 3 squadrons of Hurricanes and 3 squadrons of Spitfires (total 72 fighters) over a South Coast town, the whole formation then proceeding to the Foret de Guînnes [*sic*] area in France where our squadron successfully dropped 16/250 [16 x 250kg bombs] and 48/40 lb bombs on ammunition and stores dumps hidden in the woods. Fires were started. The fighter escort shot down three Me 190s with the loss of one Hurricane, the pilot of which escaped by parachute though slightly wounded."

The following signal from the A.O.C. 11 Group was duly received by 114 Squadron: "The Prime Minister and C-in-C Fighter Command wish their congratulations be communicated to all concerned on their very satisfactory operations over Northern France… I add my own congratulations and look forward to further success in operations of this kind."

HMS ILLUSTRIOUS ATTACKED



The lead-ship of a class of four aircraft carriers, HMS *Illustrious* was laid down in April 1937 in response to the increasing threat of war. The fourth Royal Navy ship to carry the name – the first one being in 1795 – she was launched nearly two years later to the day.

The completion of her construction had been delayed to permit the installation of a Type 79 radar system which was designed to give warning of the approach of aircraft. This was the first time that such equipment had been fitted in an aircraft carrier. Joining the Fleet in August 1940, HMS *Illustrious* steamed straight to the Mediterranean.

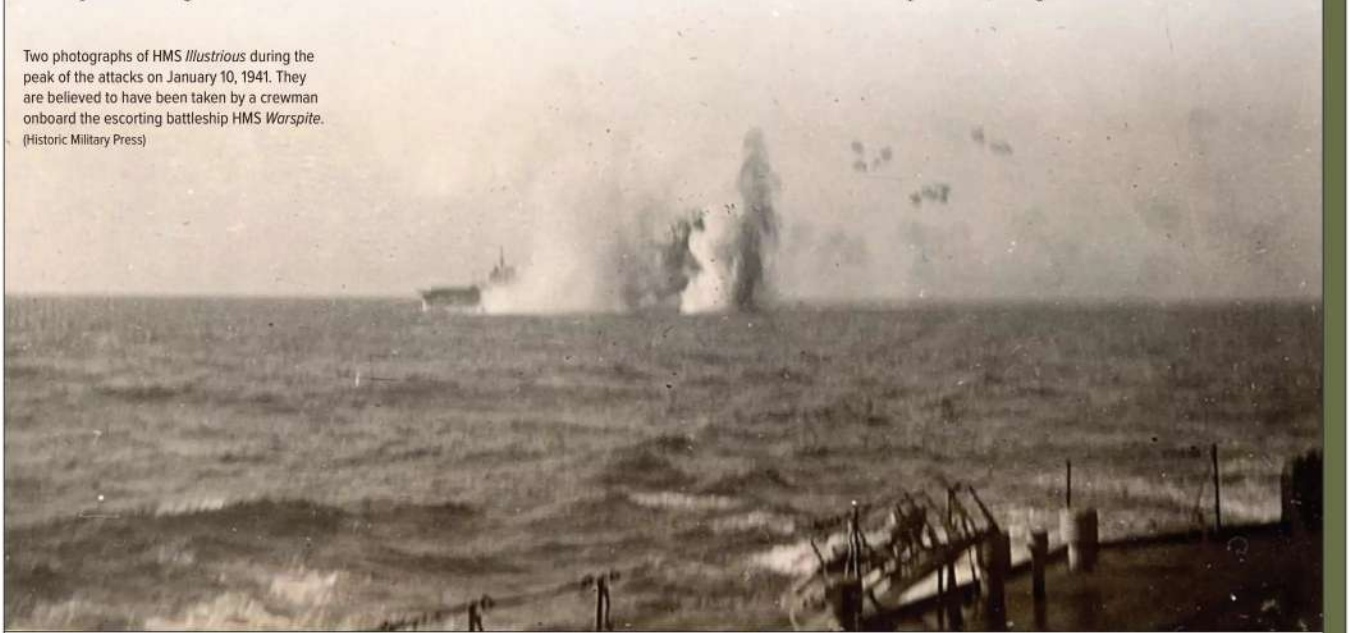
The design of the Illustrious-class carriers was such that the entire and very vulnerable aircraft accommodation area was protected all round by armoured hanger walls – in effect providing an armoured box in which aircraft were stored. The result of this added protection was, however, that whilst the four carriers in the class were only marginally smaller than HMS *Ark Royal*, the former carried far fewer aircraft. On the plus side, the Illustrious-class was probably the toughest group of aircraft carriers to serve in World War Two, the thick armour enabling the ships to withstand heavy hits.

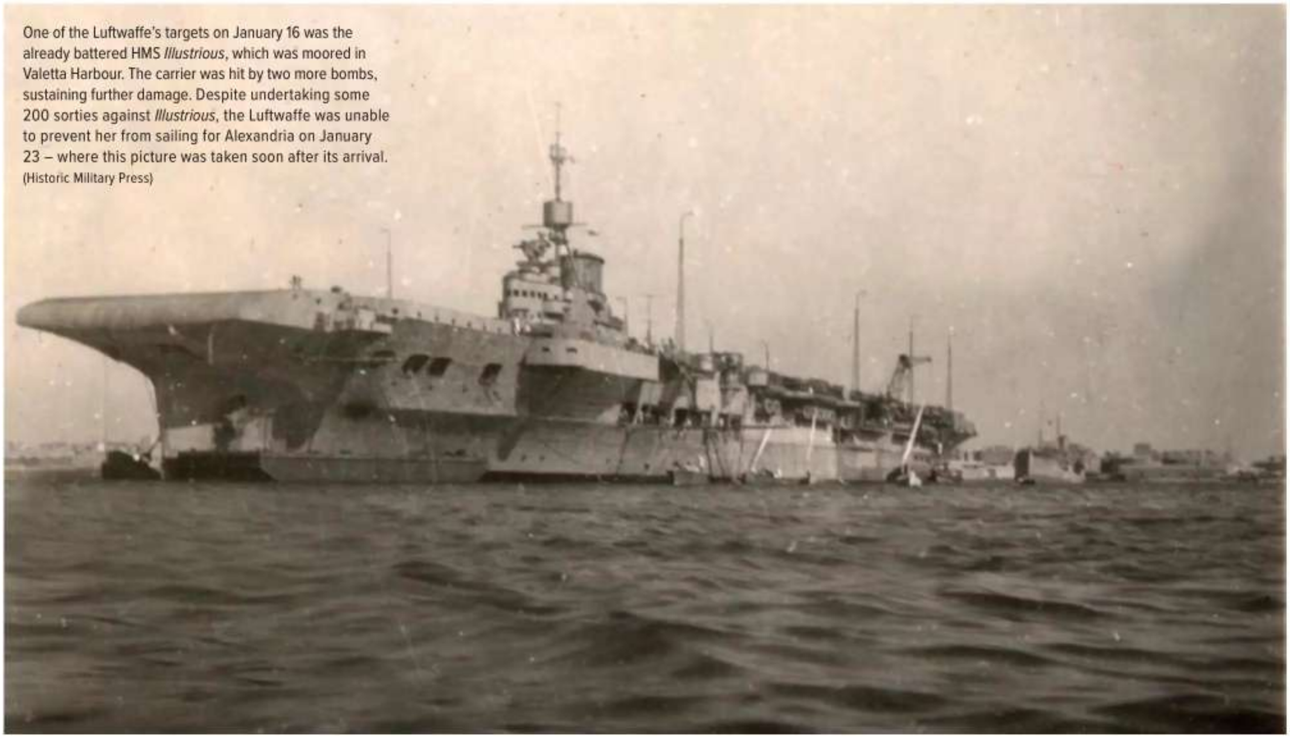
This attribute was, in the case of *Illustrious*, severely tested during Operation *Excess*. This was a series of Allied supply convoys routed through the Mediterranean to destinations such as Malta, which was increasingly finding itself on the frontline, Alexandria and Greece. The first of these was Convoy MC4, which sailed from Gibraltar on January 6. Though it comprised just four merchant ships, *lan Cumming*, *Clan MacDonald* and *Empire Song*, which were bound for Piraeus, and *Essex*, headed for Malta with a desperately needed cargo of 3,000 tons of seed potatoes, 4,000 tons of ammunition and 12 crated Hurricanes, MC4 was covered by a formidable array of warships, including HMS *Illustrious*.

By January 10, the convoy was nearing Malta. HMS *Illustrious*, by then about 60 miles west of the island, found itself under sustained aerial attack from Luftwaffe bombers, including Junkers Ju 87 Stuka dive-bombers, which had only just arrived in theatre. Those on the ships around *Illustrious* who had the time to do so could only stand and stare in disbelief as the water around the carrier literally stared to boil. As one of the images seen here shows, the carrier frequently disappeared behind a wall of spray. Everyone waited anxiously for her to reappear, which she thankfully did, but by the end of the attacks *Illustrious* had been badly damaged.

HMS *Illustrious* was hit by five bombs, including one which failed to explode, and a near miss that disabled her rudder mechanism. One of the bombs struck a lowered elevator, causing extensive damage in the hangar, with many casualties among aircraft maintenance personnel. Nine Swordfish and five Fulmars were destroyed. Escorted by the destroyers *Hasty* and *Jaguar*, *Illustrious* headed for Malta. Even there, however, the carrier still represented a target for Axis bombers.

Two photographs of HMS *Illustrious* during the peak of the attacks on January 10, 1941. They are believed to have been taken by a crewman onboard the escorting battleship HMS *Warspite*. (Historic Military Press)





One of the Luftwaffe's targets on January 16 was the already battered HMS *Illustrious*, which was moored in Valetta Harbour. The carrier was hit by two more bombs, sustaining further damage. Despite undertaking some 200 sorties against *Illustrious*, the Luftwaffe was unable to prevent her from sailing for Alexandria on January 23 – where this picture was taken soon after its arrival. (Historic Military Press)

LUFTWAFFE APPEARS OVER MALTA

It was Admiral Nelson who first seized Malta for the Royal Navy from General Napoleon Bonaparte's troops. The latter had, in turn, taken the island from the Knights Hospitaller, who had been at the forefront of the war in defence of Christendom. Malta's position in the centre of the Mediterranean gave it considerable strategic importance and the island had found itself besieged by the Muslim forces of the Ottoman Empire. The four-month 'Great Siege' of 1565 was soon, however, to be overshadowed in terms of duration and ferocity by another seize – one that would see the Axis forces pound the island until it was the most bombed place on the planet.

It was because of its proximity to Italy, from where bombers could easily reach Malta, that the Royal Navy moved the base of its Mediterranean Fleet in 1937, making the port of Alexandria in Egypt its new home. The defence of the Western Mediterranean was then entrusted to the navy of Britain's ally, France, with the Royal Navy taking responsibility for guarding the Eastern Mediterranean. As a result, when war was declared in 1940, Malta was not the powerfully defended island it had been, with just 42 anti-aircraft guns and four obsolescent Gloster Gladiators, for which only three pilots were available, and less than 4,000 troops to oppose any enemy attacks. Possibly of even greater concern was the fact that there was only a few weeks' food supplies for the 300,000-strong Maltese population.

Rescue personnel at work among the ruins of a shattered Maltese house. (Danish National Museum)

The French capitulation in June 1940 upset the arrangements and a new fleet, Force H, had to be quickly formed at Gibraltar to keep open the entrance to the Mediterranean – and on the 11th of that same month the Italian Air Force launched the first of its bombing raids on the island.

More raids followed, but the converted aircraft carrier HMS *Argus* delivered a squadron of Hawker Hurricanes to Malta in August 1940, and the island was able to put up a stern defence. The next major development occurred in January 1941, the result of a growing interest by Hitler in the Mediterranean theatre, as well as the region as a whole. As part of this, the Luftwaffe's X. Fliegerkorps, a specialist coastal operations unit, was transferred from Norway to Italy from where it could operate against Malta and British shipping transiting the Mediterranean.

By January 8, 96 bombers had been deployed to bases on Sicilian airfields, being joined two days later by 25 twin-engine fighters. By mid-January the figure had risen to 186 aircraft of all types.

Having initially concentrated on targeting shipping in the Mediterranean, such as the attack on HMS *Illustrious* on January 10, on January 16 that the Luftwaffe joined Mussolini's *Regia Aeronautica Italiana* in its siege of Malta. Hitherto, the Italian bombers had succeeded in killing and wounding about 200 Maltese and destroyed 350 houses. In the next four-and-a-half months, the Germans killed half as many again, and demolished 2,000 homes.

TOBRUK CAPTURED BY THE ALLIES

The Middle East Command was formed under General Sir Archibald Wavell in August 1939, having under its control the British and Commonwealth troops in Egypt, Palestine, Sudan, Cyprus, Kenya and, at the start of 1940, British Somaliland. At the outbreak of war, the entire command, spread across all these countries, consisted of just 21 battalions of infantry with only 64 field guns. Reinforcements came from India, Australia and New Zealand, as well as Rhodesia, South Africa and even Malta, Mauritius and Poland. It was truly a multi-national force that had been assembled and was as prepared as could be when Italy declared war on France and Britain in June 1940 and the fighting in the Middle East began.

What Wavell's mixed force faced were 215,000 Italian troops in Libya and over 200,000 in Italian East Africa. Though considerably outnumbered, Wavell immediately went onto the offensive. After defeating the Italians in the Battle of Bardia on January 5, 1941, the 6th Australian Division and the 7th Armoured Division pressed on and made contact with the Italian garrison in Tobruk on January 6.

As the only major port in eastern Libya, as well as serving as the Italian Navy's base in the region, Tobruk was of considerable strategic importance. As a result, the town had been garrisoned and fortified by the Axis forces– but this did not deter Wavell.

On the night of January 20/21, Tobruk was assailed from all sides. The Royal Navy bombarded the port from the sea, artillery shelled its defences from the land and RAF aircraft bombed Tobruk from the air. It was under the cover of the bombardment that tanks of four armoured brigades moved into position for the final assault. The darkness of the desert night also concealed the British sappers as they cleared paths through the minefields which arced round Tobruk.

At first light on the 21st, their move having been postponed for one day owing to severe sandstorms, the Australian 2/3rd Infantry Battalion led the attack, breaking through the Italian defences. Through the breach poured more men and tanks, overwhelming the Italians. By the end of the day, half of the fortified area of Tobruk had been captured.

Members of the Australian 2/11th Infantry Battalion pictured on the escarpment on the south side of the harbour at Tobruk after they successfully penetrated the Italian defences on January 22, 1941. (Australian War Memorial; 005392)

Wavell's Commonwealth force renewed its assault the following morning. "Early on the morning of the 22nd," Wavell himself noted in his subsequent despatch, "the town was entered without resistance. During the night, fires and explosions had been seen and heard, and it was found that demolitions had been carried out in the harbour and on other installations and stores."

The Italians fought on until, at 16.00 hours on January 22, General Della Mura surrendered the last of the fortified positions. "The number of prisoners amounted to nearly 30,000," added Wavell, "among whom were many specialists and a naval detachment of over 2,000. 236 guns of 75mm and over, 87 tanks, and much motor transport were also taken." The capture of Tobruk was a notable early Allied success in the North African campaign.

British artillery shelling Tobruk in preparation for the final Allied assault on January 21/22, 1941. (via Historic Military Press)

LAST STUKA SHOT DOWN ON BRITISH SOIL

Though they are generally associated with the events of the summer of 1940, at least in terms of their forays into British airspace, operational missions by Junkers Ju 87 Stukas were being flown long after the Battle of Britain officially concluded at the end of October 1940.

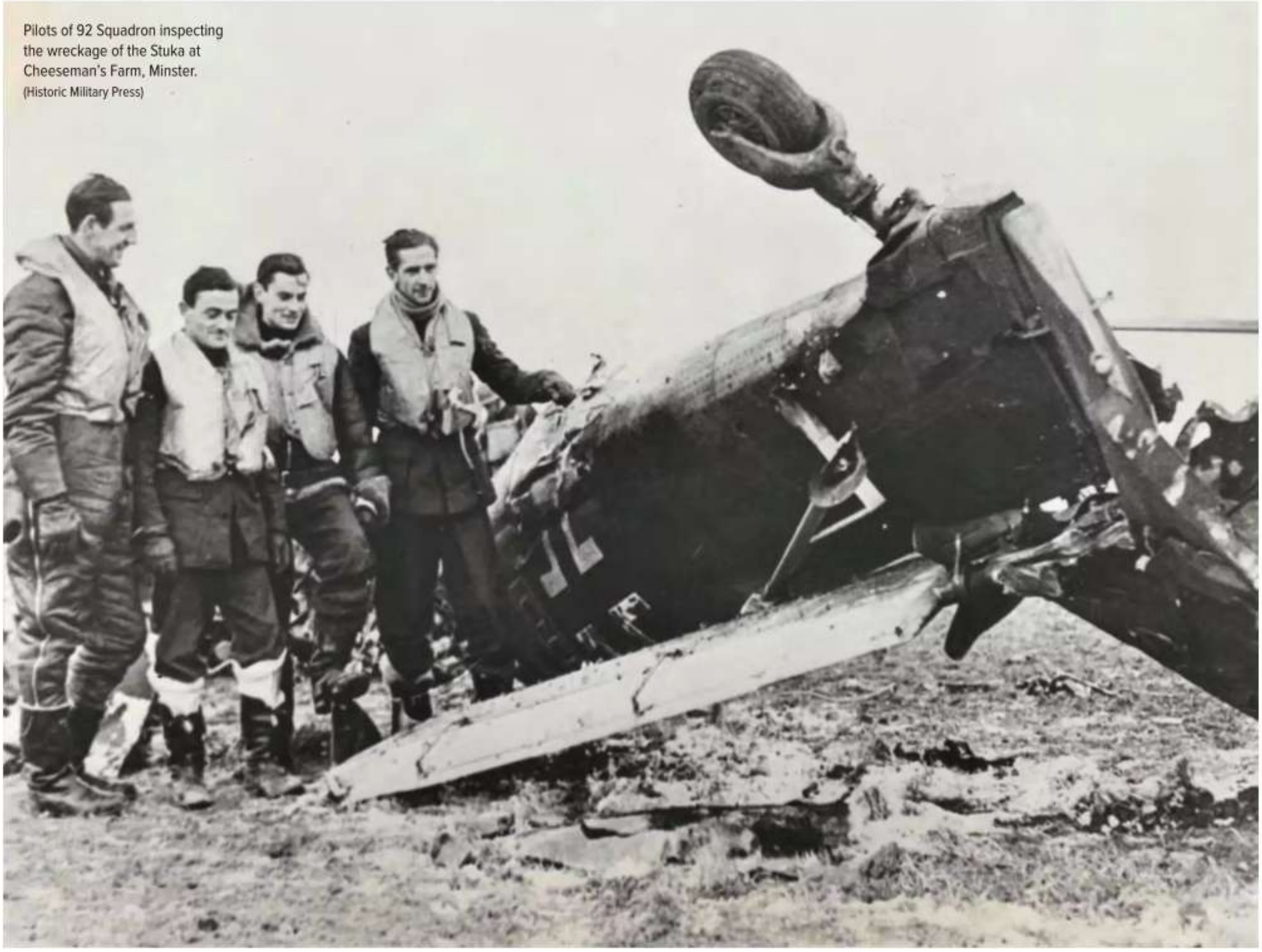
During the winter of 1940-1941, the Stuka force was again tasked for operations against the UK. In most cases, this entailed a return to attacks against coastal convoys in the English Channel and shipping in the Thames Estuary, but saw also limited Stuka night sorties against London. It was, however, one of the shipping attacks that saw the last loss of a Ju 87 over British soil.

On February 5, 1941, aircraft of 2./StG 1 were detailed to target shipping off the Kent coast. In the course of this raid, they attacked and sunk HM Trawler *Tourmaline* off North Foreland. However, the dive-bombers soon drew the attention of patrolling Spitfires from 92 Squadron operating from RAF Manston.

The CO of 92 Squadron at this time was the Canadian ace, Squadron Leader J A 'Johnny' Kent. He later described what happened that day from his perspective on the ground at Manston: "Having been on the first patrol of the morning, I had been back to the Mess for breakfast and was just returning to Dispersal when I heard gunfire. I stopped the car and got out to stare in amazement at the sight of one lone Stuka weaving madly in an attempt to avoid the attentions of four Spitfires. All five were coming straight towards me… The Stuka reached the edge of the airfield almost directly above me and at about a hundred feet. Here he was headed off by one of the Spitfires and I could clearly see both gunner and pilot in their cockpits with the de Wilde ammunition bursting all around them. The Spitfire overshot and pulled away and the German made another desperate attempt to land, turning violently to port. At this moment Pilot Officer Fokes (in my aeroplane) flashed past me and gave a short burst with his cannons. I can still hear the 'thump-thump-thump' of them followed by the 'whoosh' as the Stuka blew up and crashed just outside the boundary of the airfield."

The attacks by Pilot Officer R H 'Ronnie' Fokes and his fellow 92 Squadron pilots caused the stricken dive bomber to roll over and plunge into the ground at Cheeseman's Farm, Minster. Both the pilot, Leutnant E Schimmelpfennig, and his gunner, *Obergefreiter* H Kaden, were killed. Within minutes, pilots of 92 Squadron were on the scene to inspect their "kill" and photographed with the wreckage of the Stuka. With the *werke* number 5225, it carried the fuselage codes J9+BK.

At least two other Stuka aircraft were shot down during raids against British coastal targets in the days immediately following this incident, although both fell into the sea or river estuaries. Schimmelpfennig's Stuka was, therefore, the last to fall on British soil in World War Two.


Pilots of 92 Squadron inspecting the wreckage of the Stuka at Cheeseman's Farm, Minster. (Historic Military Press)

The 8,190-ton tanker MV *Capulet* after being torpedoed 200 miles south of Iceland by *U-552* on April 28, 1941. (Historic Military Press)

FUHRER DIRECTIVE No.23

Despite possessing the finest battleships the world had yet seen, by the winter of 1940-1941, the Kriegsmarine's surface fleet was still immeasurably weaker than that of the Royal Navy. This meant that Hitler's big ships could not operate freely in the open seas. Indeed, the heavy cruiser *Graf Spee* had been sunk in December 1939, while the battlecruisers *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* had been restricted to limited (albeit successful) raids, and, by the beginning of 1941, *Tirpitz* had yet to complete her sea trials.

It was the U-boats that, at the start of 1941, were having the greatest impact on the Battle of the Atlantic. Since the German government had announced the total blockade of the UK on August 15, 1940, there had been an intensification of the U-boat campaign. Correspondingly, Allied merchant ship losses increased. This was also the period in which Admiral Dönitz began to further develop his 'Rudeltaktik', or Wolf Pack tactics. The result was that by the end of 1940 the U-boat crews were enjoying what they called "The Happy Time". Nevertheless, too many Allied merchant ships were still getting through.

It was against this backdrop that Hitler, concerned that his previous instructions on the subject had not appeared to have had a marked effect on the British population, issued Directive No.23 on February 6, 1941. This document, entitled "Directions for operations against the English war economy", was chiefly concerned with doubling-down on the destruction of the UK's maritime lifeline.

In it the Führer noted that, "the heaviest effect of our operations against the English war economy has lain in the high losses in merchant shipping inflicted by sea and air warfare. This effect has been increased by the destruction of port installations, the elimination of large quantities of supplies, and by the diminished use of ships when compelled to sail in convoy." However, he then made the following observations on the effects of the Kriegsmarine's efforts: "The least effect of all (as far as we can see) has been made upon the morale and will to resist of the English people."

The German leader then went on to point out that, "In the course of the next few months, the effectiveness of our naval operations against enemy merchant shipping may be expected to increase thanks to the wider use of submarines and surface ships." He also instructed that, "For this purpose it will be necessary… to attack shipping, especially when homeward bound, by all methods… For the execution of these tasks, it should be noted [that] the sinking of merchantmen is more important than attack on enemy warships."

In conclusion, Hitler remarked that, "By reducing the available enemy tonnage, not only will the blockade, which is decisive to the war, be intensified, but enemy operations in Europe or Africa will be impeded." The Battle of the Atlantic, certainly in the first half of 1941, was to be at the front of the Fuhrer's drive to bring the British government to the negotiating table.

At the time she was hit, *Capulet* was one of 50 merchant ships that formed the east-bound Convoy HX-121. The convoy, pictured here from the deck of the destroyer HMS *Douglas*, had set out into the Atlantic on April 16, 1941. (Historic Military Press)

VICTORY AT BEDA FOMM

Following his success at Tobruk, General Wavell urged his men on as part of Operation *Compass*, an offensive that was originally launched on December 9, 1940. In many cases, as Wavell noted, the advance was more a case of simply pursuing the Italians. "Early on the 30th January," he wrote, "the enemy withdrew from his advanced positions East of Derna, whilst still holding his ground on the Wadi Derna. By Monday the 3rd February, air reconnaissance proved beyond doubt that the enemy had decided on further withdrawal. Large columns were moving Westward, tanks were being entrained at Barce and general cessation of hostile air activity indicated the abandoning of aerodromes South of Benghazi."

By February 5, large parts of the Italian Tenth Army were caught south of Benghazi at Beda Fomm on the coast road to El Agheila. Many of the Allied units involved, particularly the armoured force under Lieutenant-General Richard O'Connor, had crossed the open desert to outflank and trap the withdrawing enemy.

A pair of photographs that show Italian Carro Armato M13/40 tanks captured at the Battle of Beda Fomm. (Both Courtesy of the Australian War Memorial)

The two sides came into contact on February 6. For two days, bitter fighting raged in this part of the Libyan desert. Despite being outnumbered by four to one, and having tanks that were all but worn out, the Allies gradually began to dominate. Such was the battering the Italians endured, despite frequently stubborn resistance, that by the afternoon of the 7th the desert was littered with a 15-mile-long line of destroyed and abandoned Axis armour and transport vehicles. The Italians, lacking any more tanks, realised that they could no longer fight their way out of Wavell's trap and surrendered.

As an eerie silence settled over the battlefield, some 20,000 Italian soldiers were swept into captivity. This included nearly all of the Tenth Army's senior officers; its Commanding Officer had been mortally wounded in the fighting.

The victory at Beda Fomm effectively brought Operation *Compass* to an end, as, on February 9, Churchill ordered General Wavell to halt his offensive. By this stage, the Allied troops had reached El Agheila, entering the town on February 7.

As Wavell himself revealed, his men had "beaten and destroyed an Italian army of four Corps, comprising nine divisions and part of a tenth, and had captured 130,000 prisoners, 400 tanks and 1,290 guns, besides vast quantities of other war material [*sic*]. In these operations we never employed a larger force than two divisions, of which one was armoured. Actually, three divisions took part, since the 6th Australian Division relieved the 4th Indian Division after the Sidi Barrani battle. The 7th Armoured Division took part in the operations throughout, at the end of which it was practically reduced to a skeleton. Our casualties were extremely light and amounted to 500 killed, 1,373 wounded, 55 missing only."

The astonishing success of Operation *Compass* had seen the Italian Army in North Africa routed, and huge swathes of enemy territory captured. Observing the collapse of Mussolini's forces, Hitler, however, took decisive action. The fighting in North Africa, it would soon transpire, was far from over.

Rommel pictured in one of his staff cars following his arrival in Tripoli on February 12, 1941. (Historic Military Press)

ROMMEL ARRIVES IN NORTH AFRICA

Recently promoted to the rank of Generalleutnant, Erwin Rommel flew into Tripoli on February 12, 1941, to take command of a new formation, the Deutsches Afrika Korps. Formed on Hitler's orders a month earlier on January 11, the Afrika Korps, initially consisting of the 5th Light Division (later renamed the 21st Panzer Division) and the 15th Panzer Division, had been deployed to North Africa, under Operation *Sonnenblume*. The first convoy carrying Rommel's men had docked the day before their leader's arrival.

The Afrika Korps was to bolster the failing Italian forces following the disaster that befell Mussolini's Tenth Army at Beda Fomm. With that victory the whole of Cyrenaica was in Allied hands and the road to the Libyan capital, Tripoli, was wide open.

Wavell's successes also meant that the threat the Italians had posed to Britain's control of Egypt had been eliminated. No further westward advance was therefore considered necessary, and Churchill felt he could safely order Wavell to send a large portion of his forces to help the Greeks who were faced with invasion by German forces. This decision meant that the Italians still retained a foothold in Libya and, rather than see his Axis allies lose control of North Africa, Hitler decided to send a strong force across the Mediterranean. The hiatus in British operations in February after Beda Fomm gave the German force – the Afrika Korps – a brief period to settle in to its new surroundings.

The decision to send troops to North Africa was a hurried one and the men of the Africa Korps arrived almost completely unprepared for desert fighting. Compared to the warfare for which they had trained for in Europe, the men had to quickly learn how to operate in wide open spaces, especially in terms of navigation with few urban areas or landmarks to help identify locations, and movement often restricted to desert roads which were frequently nothing more than mere stony or dusty tracks. As there was no possibility of living off the land, as there was in Western Europe, supply lines, and their security from attack, became crucial elements in the North African campaign.

The normal sea route for Italian, and therefore German, supplies to Libya went west round Sicily, then close to the coast to the port of Tripoli, to avoid interference from British aircraft, ships and submarines based at Malta. Consequently, one of the first tasks that Rommel and his men were handed was the defence of Tripoli.

Rommel had become widely known for the speed and aggressive tactics of his 7th Panzer Division during the invasion of France in 1940. Although he and his men were in theory subordinate to the Italian commander-in-chief, General Italo Gariboldi, Rommel had no intention of sitting passively on the defensive, despite such instructions from the German High Command, the Oberkommando der Wehrmacht. He had been ordered to wait until reinforcements arrived in May, but, encouraged in no small part by Hitler who disagreed with the OKW, he struck far earlier.

Two members of the Afrika Korps pictured by their foxhole during the North African campaign. (Historic Military Press)

Two of the central warships involved in Operation *Claymore* were the two so-called Special Service Ships HMS *Queen Emma* and HMS *Princess Beatrix*. Former modern, fast Dutch canal boats, the pair were taken into Royal Navy service after the invasion of the Low Countries. Each of the ships could support some 450 troops. This photograph shows, in the background, either *Queen Emma* or *Princess Beatrix*, with landing craft deployed, during the Lofoten Raid. (Courtesy of Peter Lee)

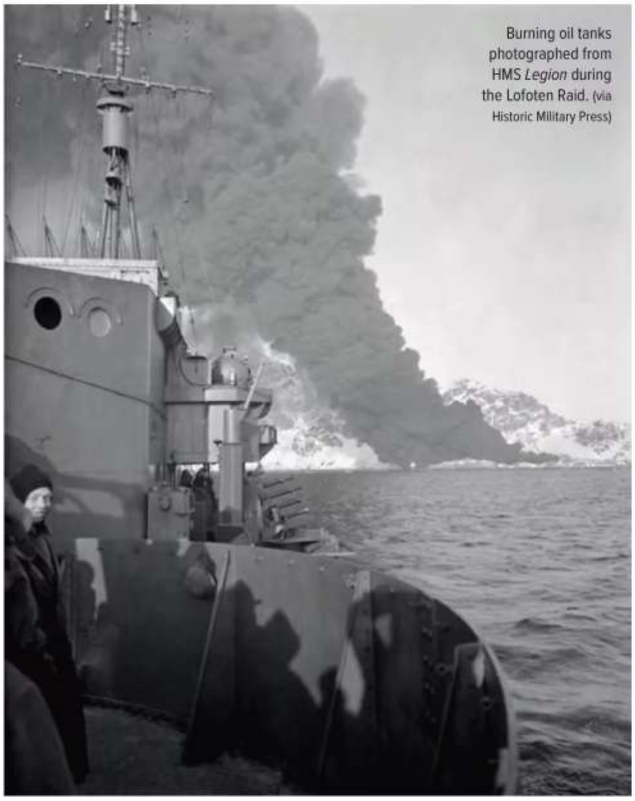
OPERATION CLAYMORE

There had been commando raids before. The newly-formed No.11 Commando had raided the French coast in June 1940, just one day after the French surrender, and an attack upon German-held Guernsey was carried out the following month. But these were only small affairs which had little impact. So, the next raid was to be an assault on a far bigger scale.

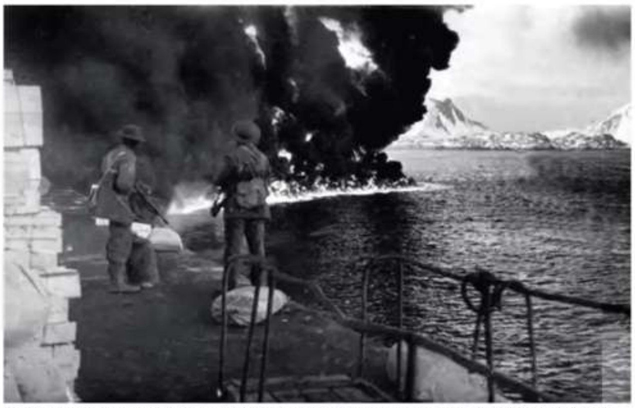
Under the codename Operation *Claymore*, the target was a small group of islands beyond the Arctic Circle some 900 miles from Britain. The Lofoten Islands are situated a few miles off the coast of northern Norway, but from there the Germans obtained valuable supplies of herring and cod oil from factories situated in the four ports of Stamsund, Henningsvær, *Svolvær* and Brettesnes. This fish oil was used to make glycerine for explosives.

The attacking force initially came together at Gourock on February 21. Then, later that evening, sailed for Scapa Flow, arriving the next day. The following week was spent on a programme of training and planning. At the same time, it was announced that the name Special Service Battalion was no longer to be used. With typical Army logic, No.3 Special Service Battalion became No.4 Commando, and No.4 Special Service Battalion became No.3 Commando.

It was to these two units that the task of attacking the Lofoten Islands fell. Whilst each Commando was 250-strong, they were to be supported by 52 Royal Engineers and 52 men from the Norwegian forces, as well, of course, the many Royal Navy personnel and vessels. No.3 Commando, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel John Durnford-Slater, was detailed to assault Stamsund and Henningsvær, whilst No.4 Commando, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel D S Lister, would attack the other two ports. As well as demolishing the factories and installations, the Commandos were to try and round up any Quisling collaborators and distribute "gifts" to the inhabitants who were known to be suffering considerable food shortages.



Burning oil tanks photographed from HMS *Legion* during the Lofoten Raid. (via Historic Military Press)



Oil burning on the surface of the sea at Stamsund, which was attacked by No.3 Commando. The men that landed at Stamsund successfully destroyed the Lofoten Cod Boiling Plant located there. (via Historic Military Press)

A Norwegian prisoner under guard on a Royal Navy warship during the return journey from the Lofoten raid. The many Norwegians who voluntarily returned with the task force were met on their arrival in Britain by King Haakon. The Quislings were interned, the decision over their eventual fate being left to the Norwegian government in London. (via Historic Military Press)

The raiding party set off from Scapa Flow on March 1 aboard two requisitioned Dutch ferries which had been converted to carry assault landing craft – HMS *Princess Beatrix* and HMS *Queen Emma* – and sailed to the Faroe Islands, arriving there at 19.00 hours that day. The task force spent five hours at Skaale-Fjord, during which time the destroyers refuelled, before setting off for the Lofoten Islands.

Eventually, at 03.00 hours on the 4th the "many navigation lights in the neighbourhood of the Lofotens came into view". The fact that they were burning seemed to show that the arrival of the Operation *Claymore* taskforce had been unheralded. The surprise was complete.

The destroyer HMS *Legion* led the craft in towards the land. The Commandos braced themselves for action as they closed in upon the quay. With their blackened faces and armed to the teeth they were prepared for a bitter battle – but found themselves being greeted by crowds of Norwegians who helped the crews of the landing craft to tie up. Instead of having to assault an enemy-held port, the Commandos were pulled up onto the quay by welcoming locals.

Facing no opposition, No.3 Commando went about its allotted tasks with the assistance of the islanders. The telephone exchange and the telegraph station were occupied to make sure no report of the landing was transmitted until the port had been secured and work began on destroying the oil and the factories. The barrels of oil were rolled into the sea and punctured by a hole or two by shots fired by the Commandos. About one ton of food, coffee and clothing was given out to the Norwegians.

The main objective for No.4 Commando was Svolvær. Because of the narrow approach to the harbour the assault was delivered in three waves – three landing craft in the first wave with the fourth boat carrying Lister and his headquarters. As the first of the boats made its final approach a trawler came out of the fjord. She was hailed by a liaison officer, Max Harper Gow, who spoke fluent Norwegian. Gow called "Aloo, aloo" beguilingly across the water, at which point the trawler made off with all haste. Lister was far from impressed: "Damm it, I didn't ask you to come all this way just to say 'Aloo'."

Nevertheless, Lister and his men were soon ashore. The police station, post office and town hall were taken over; Lister established his headquarters in the harbour master's office. The demolition work soon began.

As soon as the assault party had landed the three craft would return to HMS *Queen Emma* for the rest of the Commando. Two of the landing craft, under Mark Kerr (originally of the Rifle Brigade), made their way further up the fjord to Brettesnes where shipping was known to be anchored. It was Kerr's task to seize (with cutlasses drawn) or sink the ships he found.

By midday, their tasks having been completed, the Commandos began to re-embark. Apart from the destruction of the glycerine factories and military installations (resulting in the burning of an estimated 800,000 gallons of oil and petrol) and 11 ships sunk, the Commandos returned to the UK with 315 volunteers for the Norwegian Navy and Merchant Marine, 60 Quislings and some 228 German prisoners.

The only British casualty was one British officer who accidentally shot himself in the thigh when he slipped on the frozen surface, having carelessly stuffed a .45 Colt revolver into a trouser pocket. The raiding force returned to Scapa Flow on March 6.

Commander Sir Geoffrey Congreve Bt DSO, the Commandos' Senior Landing Officer, summed up the feelings of the men in his diary: "Confess to great disappointment in not having any fighting." Or as Peter Young (later to become Brigadier Young DSO, MC and two Bars) put it, "A raid with no fighting was better than no raid at all." That aside, few would doubt that the first of the 12 commando raids directed against Norway during World War Two was anything but a success.

A group of prisoners captured during Operation *Claymore* arriving in a prisoner of war camp in Scotland on March 9, 1941. (Historic Military Press)

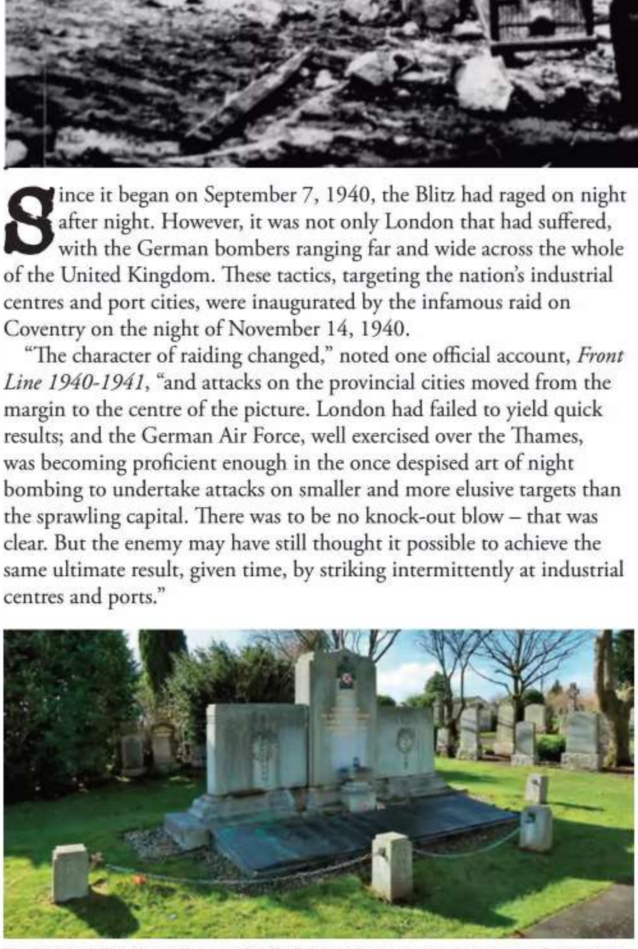
Stamsund today. One of the civilians brought back from Norway by the Commando force was a British subject – 63-year-old William Hawes. Hawes was the manager of one of the plants in the Lofoten Islands (operated pre-war by Messrs Allen & Hanbury) and had been stranded after the German invasion. Compelled to continue his work by the occupiers, he made the following statement after his return in March 1941: "When the British arrived, they told me that they were going to wreck my oil plant. I told them I should be happy to assist. The British engineers did a pretty good job – they did not leave anything worth putting together again." (Shutterstock)

THE CLYDE BLITZ

Devastation on the streets of Clydebank following the German attack on March 13, 1941. (Mirrorpix/Alamy)

Since it began on September 7, 1940, the Blitz had raged on night after night. However, it was not only London that had suffered, with the German bombers ranging far and wide across the whole of the United Kingdom. These tactics, targeting the nation's industrial centres and port cities, were inaugurated by the infamous raid on Coventry on the night of November 14, 1940.

"The character of raiding changed," noted one official account, *Front Line 1940-1941*, "and attacks on the provincial cities moved from the margin to the centre of the picture. London had failed to yield quick results; and the German Air Force, well exercised over the Thames, was becoming proficient enough in the once despised art of night bombing to undertake attacks on smaller and more elusive targets than the sprawling capital. There was to be no knock-out blow – that was clear. But the enemy may have still thought it possible to achieve the same ultimate result, given time, by striking intermittently at industrial centres and ports."


The Clydebank Blitz Memorial. Located in Old Dalnottar Cemetery, it commemorates all the citizens of Clydebank who lost their lives in the bombing in March 1941. Twenty-two unidentified citizens are interred in this grave. (Courtesy of Lairich Rig; www.geograph.org.uk)

As Göring's bombers widened their net further, it was not until March 1941, that Scotland suffered its most destructive raids of the war. On the nights of March 13 and 14, the munition-making town of Clydebank, in the industrial area of Clydeside to the west of Glasgow, was virtually wiped off the map, with over 200 bombers heading to the area on both dates.

It was a clear night along the Clyde when, at 21.00 hours on March 13, the air raid sirens began their ominous wail across the town. When they fell, the first bombs shattered the town's water mains, and huge craters in the roads and the heaps of rubble created severe problems for the rescue services. The fire brigade had to run hoses all the way from the Forth and Clyde Canal, an exhausting effort. The initial blazes acted as a visual marker for the following waves of attackers.

The National Records of Scotland (NRS) note that the "Germans' main targets in Clydebank were the armaments factory in the Singer Sewing Machine works, John Brown & Company's shipyard, and Beardmore's engine works. Singer lost a valuable stock of timber, other works suffered partial damage, but the engine works of Aitchison Blair were completely destroyed." Despite this, a report by the Civil Defence Regional Commissioner on April 3, 1941, included an assessment of the impact on industrial production on Clydeside. The NRS concludes that, "After 'first-aid' repairs to many buildings were carried out, it was claimed that production returned to near normal levels, except at badly damaged works".

Some 1,200 people lost their lives in Clydebank during its Blitz, and a further 1,000 people were seriously injured, with many more hurt less severely. The destruction of the town was almost complete with, it is stated, only eight out of approximately 12,000 houses left undamaged – staggeringly, out of a population of 50,000, some 35,000 people were made homeless. The Scottish Regional Commissioner was fully justified in subsequently describing the Clydebank Blitz as "a major disaster".

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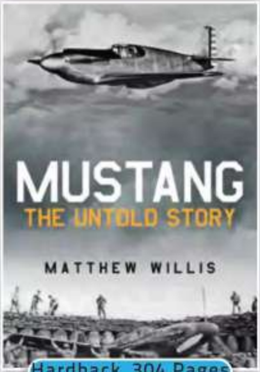
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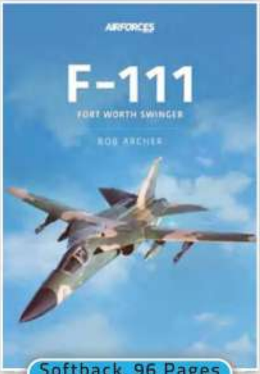
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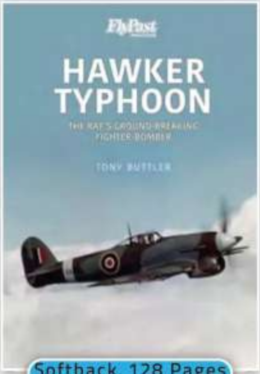
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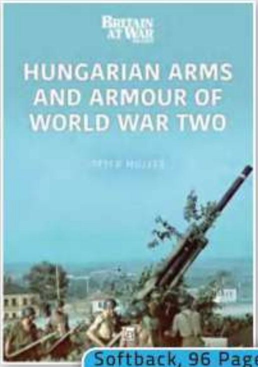
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A shopper surrenders coupons from her ration book in order to purchase her allowance of bacon. (NARA)

RATIONING INCREASED

Throughout the winter of 1940 into 1941, as the U-boat packs became increasingly active in the Atlantic, the German campaign against British and Allied merchant shipping began to bite. As a result, it was announced on March 17 that the ration of jam, marmalade, treacle and syrup was being cut to just 8oz per person per week. The severity of the supply situation was such that rationing was the subject of much debate and regulation throughout the rest of the month.

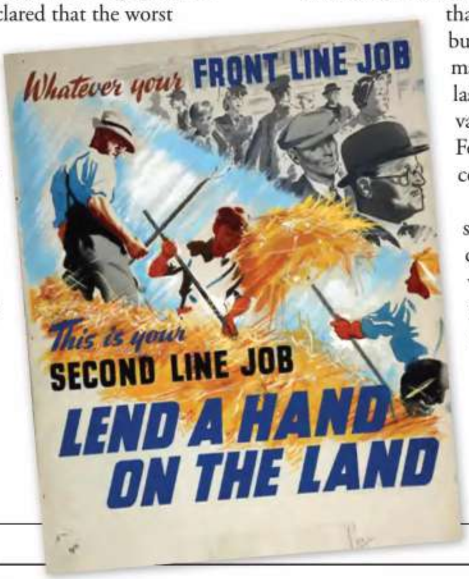
On the 18th, for example, Lord Woolton, the Minister of Food since 1940, advised the nation that it should be ready for much greater restrictions, adding that it was recommended that the population adopt a lifestyle of simpler living. He declared that the worst shortages were in the animal protein group – bacon, eggs, cheese, and meat.

In the House of Commons on the same day, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Food revealed the steps being taken in an effort to increase the supply of meat: "Arrangements [have been made] with the shippers in the South American meat supplying countries, who are the largest exporters of beef to the United Kingdom, to bone out 50 per cent of all butchers' beef and 100 per cent of all manufacturing beef and pork exported to this country. In addition, large purchases of canned beef have been made by His Majesty's Government." The intention was to increase the shipping space available.

On Friday, March 21, Churchill wrote to the Minister of Food on the subject of the planned communal kitchens that were to be set up and run by local committees on a non-profit making basis. In the letter, he stated: "I hope the term 'Communal Feeding Centres' is not going to be adopted. It is an odious expression, suggestive of Communism and the workhouse." The Prime Minister's preferred name, "British Restaurants", was eventually chosen. By mid-1941, there were more than 200 in London alone, all selling meals for a maximum set price.

It was not only foodstuffs that were rationed. In a surprise move, on June 1, 1941, Oliver Lyttleton, the President of the Board of Trade, announced that clothes were to be rationed with immediate effect and that people had to give up their margarine coupons to buy them until special ration cards were printed. Each man, woman or child was to be given 66 coupons to last for a year. The number of coupons to be given up varied according to the garment and the consumer. For example, a man's raincoat or overcoat required 16 coupons, a woman's 14, and a child's 11.

As with food rationing, which had been in place since 1940, one of the other reasons for introducing civilian clothes rationing was to ensure fairness. It was quickly noticed, however, that the rationing of clothing resulted in a surge in demand for the most hard-wearing items; other less durable articles suddenly found themselves unwanted. Clothes rationing remained in place right through until March 15, 1949.


Whatever your FRONT LINE JOB
This is your SECOND LINE JOB
LEND A HAND ON THE LAND

A wartime poster urging people to support the farming community in its effort to help feed the nation.

ROYAL VISIT TO PLYMOUTH

In order to inspect the damage suffered by Plymouth so far in the Blitz, though the first bombs had fallen back before the Battle of Britain on July 6, 1940, as well as meet many of those dealing with the aftermath of the attacks, King George VI and Queen Elizabeth visited the city on March 20, 1941.

The Royal Couple departed by train at 17.45 hours. Less than three hours later, at 20.39 hours, the sirens began sending out their chilling warning over Plymouth's streets and the vital naval base they surrounded. Just two minutes later the first German raiders arrived in the sky overhead. The Royal party had narrowly missed being greeted by a formidable force of Hitler's bombers.

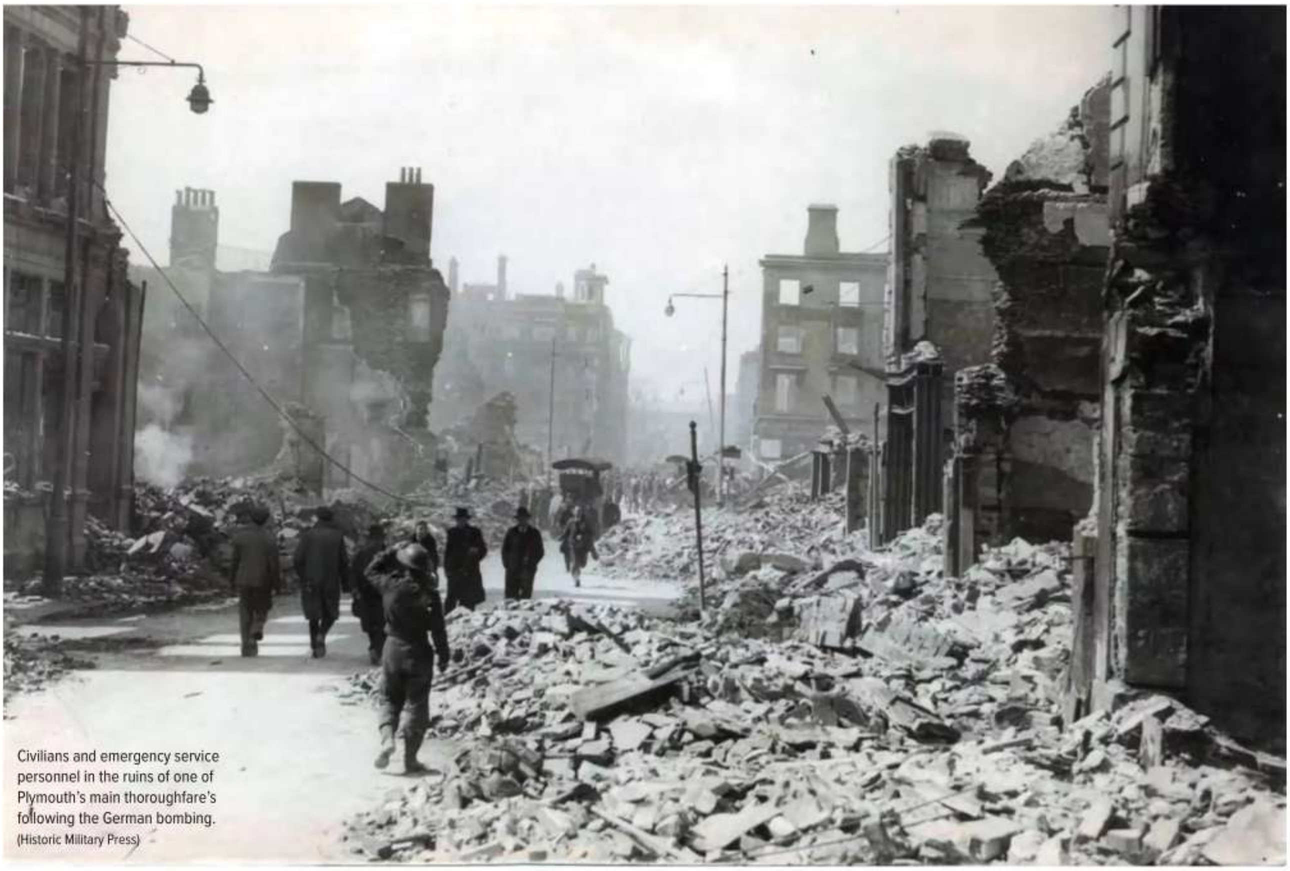
This was the beginning of a series of raids which, occurring on seven nights in March and April 1941, came to be known as the Plymouth Blitz. These attacks, as happened in so many places across the United Kingdom, quite literally tore the heart out of the city. Altogether, between June 30 until the end of the war, the city endured 59 raids, resulting in a total of 4,448 civilians being killed, wounded, or missing, believed killed. In addition, approximately 1,300 service personnel became casualties. The heaviest of the attacks, and the most deadly, were those that followed the royal visit, on the successive nights of March 20 and 21, 1941, when 336 civilians were killed, followed by five terrible nights in April which cost the lives of 590 people.

Fire was the main cause of the loss of so many buildings, estimated at around 75 per cent of the total, the city's fire appliances proving incapable of dealing with so many simultaneous outbreaks. This meant that the city's proud citizens often had to watch helplessly as many of Plymouth's grand buildings burnt to the ground.

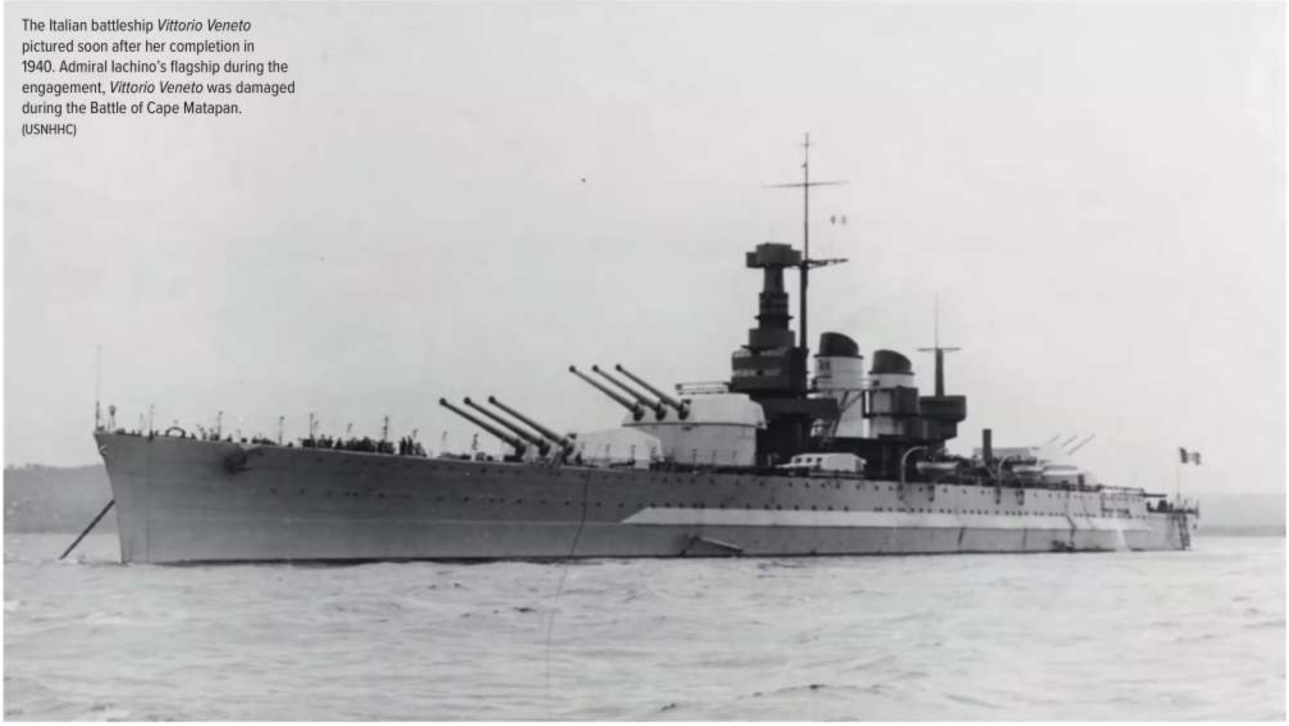
Following the raid on March 20, the King sent a message to the Viscountess Astor MP, the city's Lady Mayoress. In this His Majesty stated: "After our happy day the Queen and I are deeply distressed to hear what you have all been through last night. Whatever the people of Plymouth may be called upon to suffer, we feel quite certain the spirit of the West Country will rise above it all. God blees you all." The King followed up his telegram by personally telephoning Admiral Sir Martin Dunbar-Naismith VC, the Commander-in-Chief of Plymouth, asked that an encouraging message also be given to those serving at the naval base and its surroundings. "He desired," noted one reporter at the time, "to be kept in touch with news of how they were faring and what was being done on their behalf".

Although cities such as Liverpool, Birmingham and London had more bombs dropped on them, it is said that for the size of its population, Plymouth suffered the worst of any location in Britain during the Blitz.

The ruins of Plymouth's Charles Church stand as a reminder of the city's suffering. The building was ravaged by fire, having been set alight by incendiaries during the bombing in March 1941. (Travellight/Shutterstock)



Civilians and emergency service personnel in the ruins of one of Plymouth's main thoroughfare's following the German bombing. (Historic Military Press)



The Italian battleship *Vittorio Veneto* pictured soon after her completion in 1940. Admiral Iachino's flagship during the engagement, *Vittorio Veneto* was damaged during the Battle of Cape Matapan. (USNHHC)

AMBUSH AT MATAPAN

Throughout 1941, the naval and air forces of the Allies and Axis battled for control of the vital supply lines across the Mediterranean. The prize for the victor would be the security of their own sea lanes, as well as the ability to harass those of the other side. The southernmost point of mainland Greece, and the second southernmost point in mainland Europe, it was Cape Matapan that gave its name to perhaps the most significant naval engagement in the Mediterranean during World War Two.

The Italian Navy not sailed in force since the Fleet Air Arm's strike at Taranto in November 1940. Then, on March 26, 1941, Rear Admiral Angelo Iachino put to sea with a formidable raiding force, which included the relatively new battleship *Vittorio Veneto*, to undertake Operation *Gaudo*. The intention was to attack Allied convoys serving Malta, North Africa and other destinations in the Mediterranean theatre – including Crete and Greece.

Three Royal Australian Navy warships participated in the Battle of Cape Matapan. This picture shows one of those vessels, the light cruiser HMAS *Perth*, behind a smoke screen, as seen from HMS *Gloucester*. (Australian War Memorial; P01915.018))

Having learnt of the Italian plans through decrypted Axis communications, Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham decided to surprise Iachino's armada near Crete. On March 27, a Short Sunderland flying boat of 230 Squadron spotted the Italian fleet, depriving Iachino of any advantage of surprise. Cunningham prepared his next moves carefully, readying his ambush.

At 08.12 hours on March 1941, the Italian 3rd Cruiser Division opened fire upon HMS *Gloucester* at a distance of 24,000 yards, marking the start of the Battle of Cape Matapan. The Royal Navy's Naval Situation Report reveals what followed: "On the morning of the 28th March our light forces sighted one Littorio-class battleship, accompanied by cruisers, to the south-west of Crete steering south-east, while air reconnaissance reported two battleships, cruisers and destroyers to the north of this position. On being sighted the enemy turned westward, proceeding at high speed.

"During the day the Littorio-class battleship was repeatedly and successfully attacked with torpedoes by the Fleet Air Arm which caused serious damage. A successful attack was also made by bombers of the R.A.F. on cruisers and destroyers. The loss of speed resulting from these air attacks enabled our heavier ships to gain contact with the enemy at dusk, and a short but decisive action took place… Two dive-bombers were shot down during daylight operations. Apart from three Naval aircraft which are missing, no damage or casualties were sustained by any of our ships.

"On the morning of the 29th nearly a thousand Italian survivors were rescued, which number would have been considerably increased had not German bombers attacked the rescuing ships."

At Cape Matapan, the Royal Navy won a significant battle. As Cunningham himself noted, "Five ships of the enemy fleet were sunk, burned or destroyed". "Except for the loss of one aircraft in action," he added, "our fleet suffered no damage or casualties", aside from the three-man crew of a Fleet Air Arm Albacore that was shot down. The Italians, on the other hand, lost 2,300 men killed and 1,015 captured. Never again would Mussolini's fleet challenge Britain's naval domination the Mediterranean.

THE FALL OF BENGHAZI

During the "Benghazi Handicap", the two most senior British generals in Libya were captured by the Germans at Derna on April 6, 1941. Major General Richard O'Connor and Lieutenant-General Sir Philip Neame VC are both in this group of captured British officers all waiting to be transported back to Europe, as prisoners of war, in a Junkers Ju 52 transport. (Historic Military Press)

Predictably, Rommel wasted little time. Within four days of his arrival, those elements of the Afrika Korps that were ready to move had been despatched to the front. In the days that followed, the 15th Panzer Division, one of the most powerful Axis units then in Africa, was readied for combat.

The Afrika Korps' first offensive was unleashed on by Rommel, against the town of El Agheila, on March 24. Outnumbered, the small British garrison began withdrawing east towards Mersa Brega, back along the coast road to Benghazi – the very route down which they had so recently pursued the Italians.

It was now the turn of Wavell's men to endure an endless series of retreats. As Rommel's infantry struck at Allied positions, the panzers swept around the flanks towards their rear. Under such sustained pressure, the Allies were forced to pull back. It was a confused withdrawal that became known as the "Benghazi Handicap".

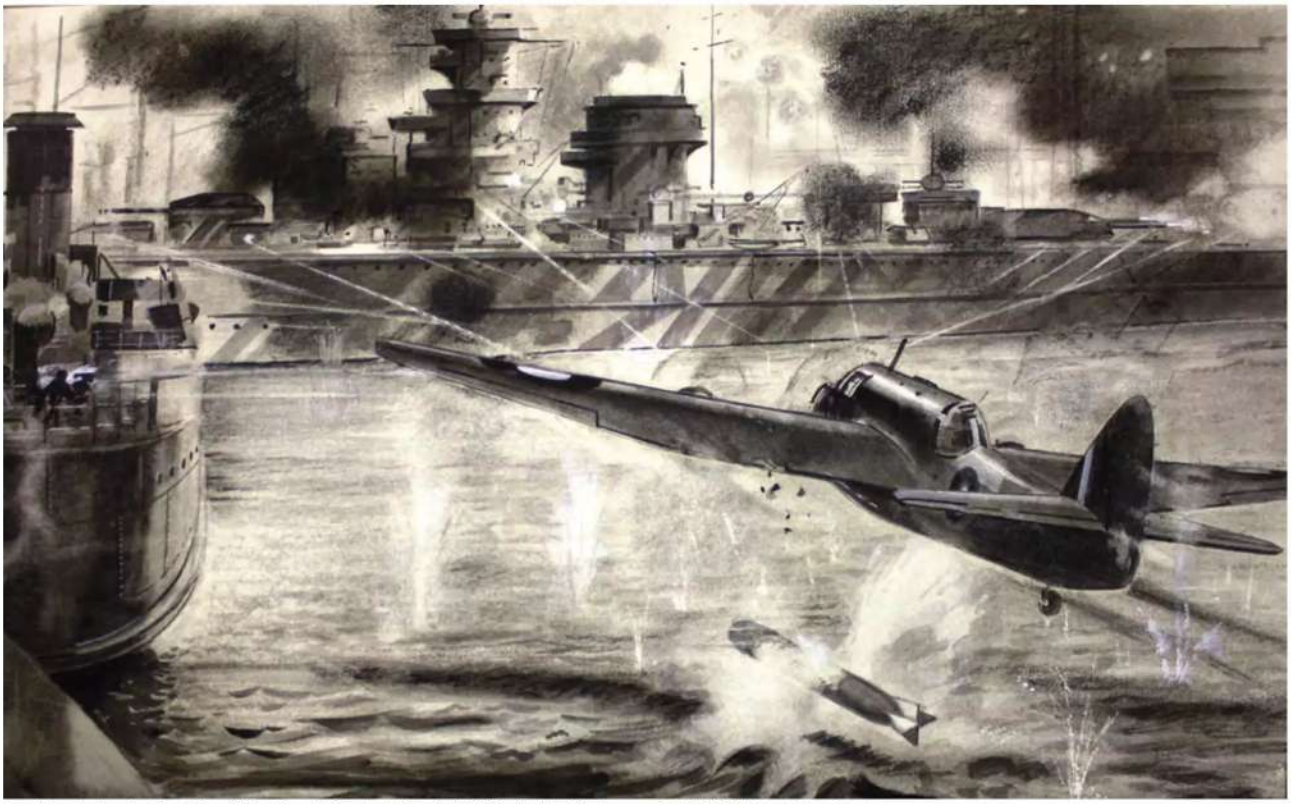
Wavell had watched the success of Rommel's advance with growing anxiety. On advising London that Benghazi itself was likely to be threatened, and that a withdrawal might be the only option, he drew a sharp rebuke from Churchill. On April 2, the Prime Minister wrote: "It would be all right to give up ground for the purposes of manoeuvre, but any serious withdrawal from Benghazi would appear most melancholy. I cannot understand how the enemy can have developed any considerable force at the end of this long, waterless coast-road, and I cannot feel that there is at this moment a persistent weight behind this attack in Cyrenaica. If this blob which has come forward against you could be cut off, you might have a prolonged easement. Of course, if they succeed in wandering onwards, they will gradually destroy the effect of your victories."

Rommel's men, however, had the momentum – and he well knew it. On the evening of April 2, Rommel wrote to his wife: "The 'brass' at Tripoli, Rome and possibly Berlin will gasp. I took the risk against all orders and instructions because I saw an opportunity. No doubt it will all be pronounced good later and I am sure that anybody in my position would have done the same thing… The British are in flight."

The Allies were indeed continuing to pull back towards Egypt. At 16.45 hours on April 3, Rommel received news that the town of El Magrun, 50 miles south of Benghazi, had been abandoned. That evening he headed up to the front himself, in time to learn that no further contact had been made with Allied troops. He was also advised that it had been reported that Benghazi had been evacuated. Rommel ordered his men to seize the opportunity and press on during the night.

It was about an hour before dawn the next morning that advance German units entered the outskirts of Benghazi. It was a remarkable achievement; within a matter of weeks, his surge across Libya had seen the Afrika Korps advance a staggering 600 miles.

Rommel at the front in Libya with men of the 15th Panzer Division during 1941. (Historic Military Press)



A wartime drawing depicting Flying Officer Kenneth Campbell's Beaufort, N1016, attacking *Gneisenau* on April 6, 1941. (Historic Military Press)

COASTAL COMMAND'S FIRST VC

IT was not only the Kriegsmarine's U-boats that were causing a real threat to Britain's maritime lifeline in the Battle of the Atlantic, for Hitler still had a number of formidable surface warships that he could unleash on the world's shipping lanes. These included the battle cruisers *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*.

The danger that the pair represented was clearly illustrated on March 15, 1941, when they spotted merchant ships from a dispersed convoy in the mid-Atlantic. In the days that followed, *Scharnhorst* sank nine ships, *Gneisenau* eight. Flush with their success, but aware that Royal Navy battleships were closing in, the battle cruisers sailed for Brest, which they reached on March 22.

On March 29, RAF Bomber Command began a prolonged bombing campaign against the French port, the aim being to disable or sink *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* (and subsequently the cruiser *Prinz Eugen*), preventing them from putting to sea again. In the ten months following this date, Bomber Command carried 2,928 individual sorties against Brest, 171 of which were in daylight.

Bomber Command was not the only part of the RAF involved in the effort to tackle *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* (or *Salmon* and *Gluckstein* as the bomber crews had christened them), as Coastal Command also played its part. On April 6, 1941, for example, six Bristol Beauforts of 22 Squadron were tasked to attack the pair. But only one of them, that flown by Flying Officer Kenneth Campbell RAFVR, reached its target.

A view of *Gneisenau* underway circa 1941. (USNHHC)

The following account was published in *The London Gazette*: "The battle cruiser was secured alongside the wall on the north shore of the harbour, protected by a stone mole bending round it from the west. On rising ground behind the ship stood protective batteries of guns. Other batteries were clustered thickly round the two arms of land which encircle the outer harbour. In this outer harbour near the mole were moored three heavily-armed anti-aircraft ships, guarding the battle cruiser.

"Even if an aircraft succeeded in penetrating these formidable defences, it would be almost impossible, after delivering a low-level attack, to avoid crashing into the rising ground beyond. This was well known to Flying Officer Campbell who, despising the heavy odds, went cheerfully and resolutely to the task. He ran the gauntlet of the defences. Coming in almost at sea level, he passed the anti-aircraft ships at less than mast-height in the very mouths of their guns, and skimming over the mole launched a torpedo at point-blank range."

Campbell's Beaufort crashed or was shot down, and he and his crew of three were all killed. Reconnaissance flights the next day showed that *Gneisenau* had been moved back into dry-dock, but it was some months before it was confirmed that Campbell's torpedo had hit *Gneisenau* aft, causing extensive damage and flooding. She would not return to service for nearly six months. Because of the delay in establishing all of the facts, Campbell's award of the Victoria Cross, Coastal Command's first, was not gazetted until March 13, 1942.

SIEGE OF TOBRUK BEGINS

Three soldiers at an anti-aircraft gun, one holding ammunition, inside the Tobruk perimeter on June 19, 1941. Between April and December 1941, 34 ships were lost at Tobruk, and another 33 ships, including two hospital ships, were damaged. Axis aircraft made 3,000 sorties against the harbour and its surroundings during some 750 raids. (Library of Congress)

Following the fall of Benghazi on April 4, the Afrika Korps pushed on, relentlessly pursuing the retreating Allied forces. "In so short a time had the force, to which Wavell had committed his western flank's defence, been driven from the field and entrapped," noted the Official Australian War History. "So soon had the prestige the British had won by victories against the Italians been lost in retreat before a predominantly German force. Nor were British losses in trained men, equipment, vehicles and stores of little consequence."

Just a matter of days after his men had captured Benghazi, Rommel had all but reached the Egyptian border. Only Tobruk, a port city on Libya's eastern Mediterranean coast, barred his way. Tobruk had been an important strategic centre since antiquity. Lying about 90 miles west of the Egyptian border, it had the best natural harbour in North Africa. In order to maintain the Allies' defence of Egypt and the vital Suez Canal, Tobruk had to be held.

It was there that Wavell determined to make a stand. "I decided that it was essential to hold Tobruk," he recalled, "in order to secure the large reserves of supplies there and to prevent the enemy obtaining the use of the port and water supply for his further advance".

On April 10, the Germans cut the Tobruk-Bardia road. Shortly after the last Australians had pulled back into Tobruk itself, and under cover of a sandstorm, Rommel's men launched their first infantry attack on the Allies' outer defensive perimeter. Along the perimeter, which was some 27 miles in length and known as the Red Line, the first shots were exchanged with the Germans. Though the assault was repulsed by the defenders with heavy losses to the enemy, German and Italian troops continued encircling the fortress. By the afternoon of the April 11, Good Friday, Tobruk was completely surrounded. The siege had begun.

Tobruk's predominantly Australian garrison was around 14,000 strong. It consisted of the 9th Australian Division (20th, 24th, and 26th Brigades), the 18th Brigade of the 7th Australian Division, four regiments of British artillery, British machine-gunners, a handful of tanks and armoured cars, and an Indian infantry regiment. Day after day, the Axis pressure against the Tobruk garrison continued virtually unabated, those inside the perimeter, which was protected by anti-tank ditches, barbed wire and mines, were subjected to repeated ground assaults and almost constant shelling and aerial bombardment.

On May 1, the Afrika Korps made another concerted attempt to break through Tobruk's Red Line defences. Despite a prolonged preliminary bombardment and the deployment of flame-throwing tanks, the attack was again repulsed. Somehow, Tobruk's garrison held out. At the same time, their vital lifeline to the outside world was maintained by the ships of the Royal Navy and the Royal Australian Navy, the so-called "Tobruk Ferry".

Faced with difficult and extended supply lines and the stubborn defenders inside Tobruk, Rommel, for the first time, found his offensive in North Africa beginning to run out of steam.

The explosion of a munitions dump at Tobruk, September 1941. (Historic Military Press)

Having been given the designation XB-17, Boeing's bomber design that came to be known as the Flying Fortress was initially a speculative venture with no government requirement. However, impressed with the design, the US Army Air Corps ordered 13 test examples as Y1B-17s. By 1940, despite the proven excellence of the Flying Fortress, the USAAC's plans were for light, medium and attack bombers only. As a result, when the war in Europe began in September 1939, it had just 23 B-17s in service, though a further 53 were delivered later in the year.

At the same time, the British Purchasing Commission was urgently seeking aircraft and the US authorities agreed to allow the RAF to have 20 B-17Cs for training and familiarisation purposes pending delivery of more modern variants. The first of this batch of 20 Boeings arrived at Burtonwood in Cheshire on April 14, 1941, destined for Bomber Command's 90 Squadron.

Given the British service name Fortress I, the aircraft that 90 Squadron received were different from the mighty bomber that was flown in the latter years of the war. Visually, they varied from behind the trailing edge of the wing. At the same time, they had no power-turrets and, far from being a 'Flying Fortress', were equipped with single .30-inch machine-guns in the nose, upper midships position, underbelly "bathtub" and in each of two side-pods.

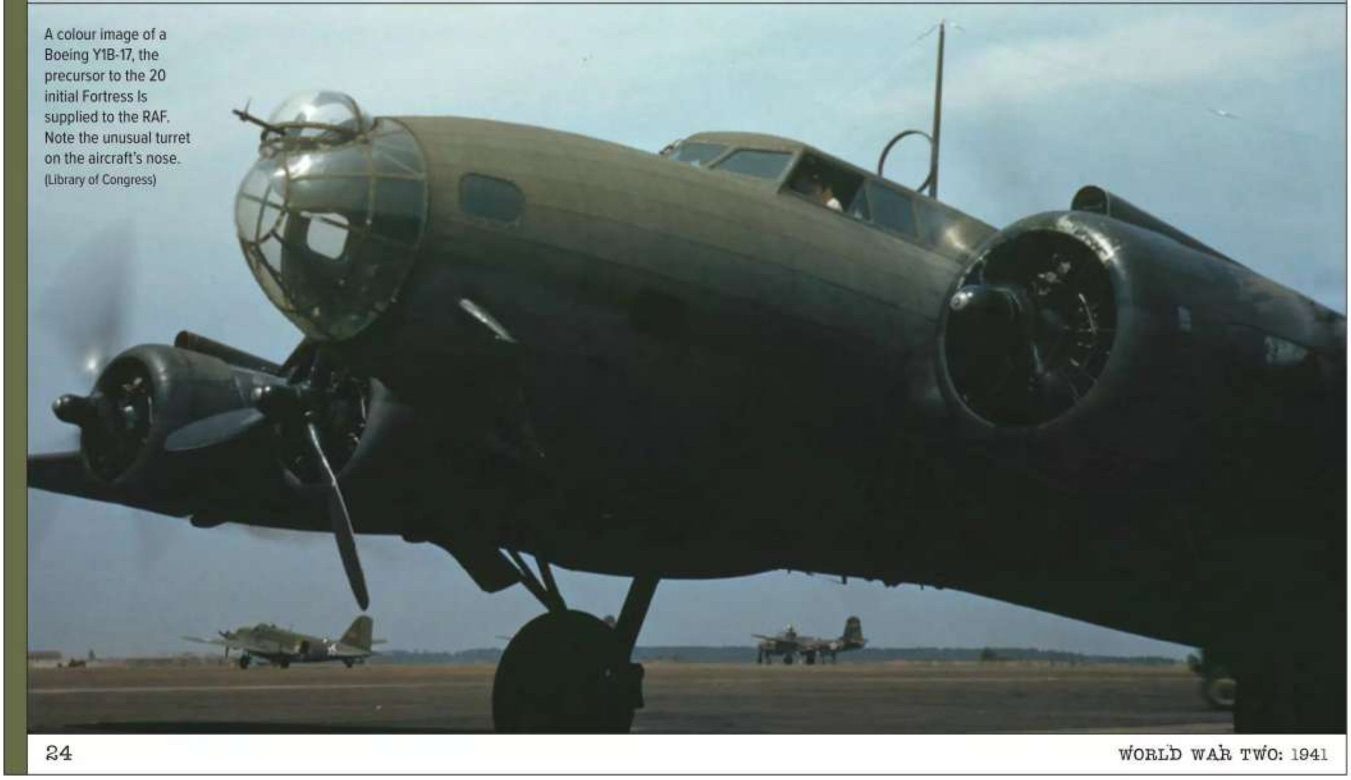
On June 22, 1941, 90 Squadron suffered its first Fortress loss. Undertaking an air test, AN522, coded WP-J, was being flown by Flying Officer John Hawley when it broke up at around 30,000 feet after flying into cumulus cloud and began to shake violently because of air turbulence. The wreckage was scattered over a wide area of moorland north of Catterick in Yorkshire. Only one member of the crew survived.

The Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, pictured having inspected one of the first Boeing Fortress Is to arrive in the UK, June 6, 1941. (Historic Military Press)

The first RAF Fortress mission of the war took place on July 8, 1941. At this time only three machines were in a suitable condition to undertake an operation. As the formation crossed the North Sea, the three bombers climbed to 27,000 feet. But, as AN519, coded 'WP-H', reached 25,000 feet it started to lose oil from the breathers in two of the engines. The oil streamed back on to the tailplane, and as a result the aircraft began vibrating badly. Squadron Leader Andrew MacLaren had no choice but to abort. He was able to discharge his bomb load on an airfield on the island of Norderney off the German coast. The remaining two machines bombed the Kriegsmarine's base at Wilhelmshaven, though two bombs carried by AN529, 'WP-C', "hung up", being eventually released on the return trip.

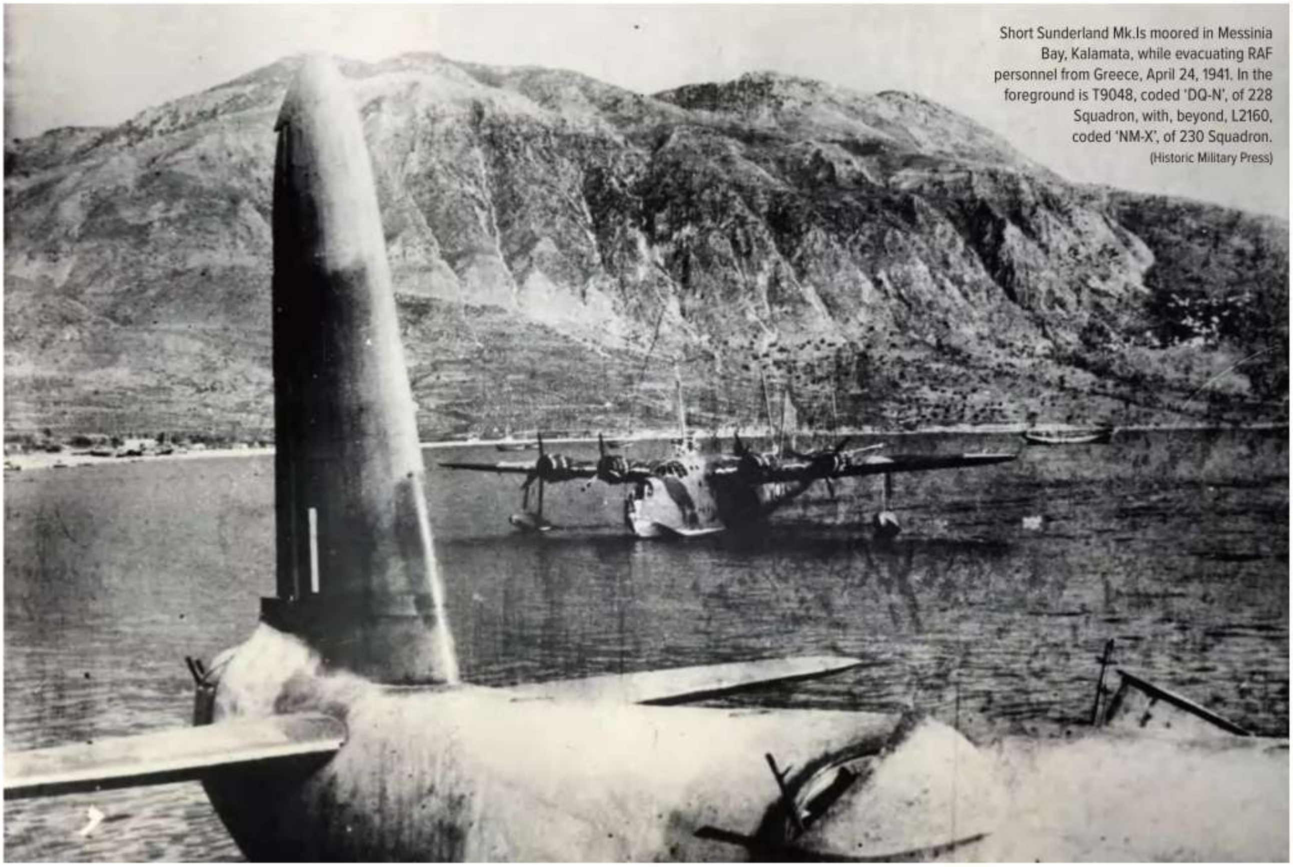
For their part, the early British Fortress I crews were "generally... quite pleased" with the aircraft, "regarding it as easy to fly, very manoeuvrable, and aerodynamically stable in the bomb run". The many lessons learnt through their experiences, however, resulted in the final development of one of the most important Allied aircraft of World War Two.

RAF'S FIRST FLYING FORTRESSES ARRIVE



A colour image of a Boeing Y1B-17, the precursor to the 20 initial Fortress Is supplied to the RAF. Note the unusual turret on the aircraft's nose. (Library of Congress)

ALLIED EVACUATION OF GREECE BEGINS



Short Sunderland Mk.Is moored in Messinia Bay, Kalamata, while evacuating RAF personnel from Greece, April 24, 1941. In the foreground is T9048, coded 'DQ-N', of 228 Squadron, with, beyond, L2160, coded 'NM-X', of 230 Squadron. (Historic Military Press)

Following the Italian attack on Greece in October 1940, a small British air force, supported by a number of army units for protection, had been deployed to the country. These Commonwealth personnel remained in situ throughout the following winter and into 1941, during which time the Greeks fought back against Mussolini's troops with some success, particularly in Albania.

Having initially appeared disinterested in the events in Greece, by early 1941 it was apparent that Hitler was starting to show a greater awareness of the junior Axis partners' lack of progress in that theatre. To help bolster the Greek defenders, it was therefore agreed that additional British units would be sent. Beginning on March 5, 1941, this deployment involved the 1st Armoured Brigade, the New Zealand Division, the 6th and 7th Australian divisions and the Polish Independent Brigade Group. The first men disembarked at Piraeus two days later, coming under the overall command of General Sir H M Wilson.

The new arrivals only had a few weeks to prepare their positions before the Germans made their move. At 05.30 hours on April 6, the XL Panzer Corps crossed the Bulgarian border into Yugoslavia. It then swung southwards with the intention of pushing on into Greece. The first contact with German troops was made by elements of the 1st Armoured Brigade at the River Axios on April 8.

On April 10, the British and Commonwealth troops holding the line in the Amynteion area came under fire. Over the next 24 hours the fighting there developed into what General Sir Archibald Wavell, the British Commander-in-Chief in the Middle East, called the "first serious engagement" in Greece. It lasted for two days, and although the German offensive was held, it soon became clear that the Allied positions were too weak to be held for any length of time, a situation quickly exacerbated by the collapse of the Yugoslav Army.

By the morning of April 20, General Wilson's men had pulled back to a new defensive line at Thermopylae. Whilst Wilson was confident in the ability of his troops, and the strength of their new positions, the rapid "disintegration of the Greek forces" was becoming an increasing concern. These developments were not lost on Wavell, so "in anticipation of the possible necessity of the evacuation of Greece", planning for a withdrawal began.

"The general situation in Greece now betokened the near end of Greek resistance," Wavell subsequently wrote. "The Greek forces on the left of the Imperial troops had already disintegrated and it was obvious that little more could be expected from the Greek armies in Albania. The Piraeus had been so heavily bombed that it was practically unusable as a port, so to send further reinforcements »

Another view of the evacuation of RAF personnel underway in Messinia Bay in April 1941. This is, once again, 228 Squadron's T9048 embarking RAF personnel from a rowing boat. (Historic Military Press)

Destroyed harbour facilities in the port of Piraeus following the devastating Luftwaffe attacks. (Danish National Museum)

German soldiers in the ruins of Olympia, an archaeological site located near the town of the same name in the Peloponnese, following its capture during the fighting in April 1941. (Danish National Museum)

or supplies to Greece had become a matter of extreme difficulty." The despatch of any remaining Allied units to the country, which included the Polish Independent Brigade Group and the 7th Australian Division, was promptly cancelled.

With the fate of his country weighing heavily on him, the Greek Prime Minister, Alexandros Koryzis, committed suicide on April 18, the same day that martial law was declared in Athens. The following day, Wilson had an audience with King George II, who was now acting as head of his government. It was decided, with the full approval of the King and the remaining members of the Greek Government, that the evacuation of British forces was essential.

General Wilson originally selected April 28 as the first night for re-embarkation, but the capitulation of the Greek army in the Epirus region on April 21 made it necessary to bring this forward to the night of the 24th-25th. It was hoped that the withdrawal would be completed in three nights.

"Thanks to the excellent arrangements by the Royal Navy, the air cover of some few Blenheim fighters [the last RAF Hurricanes, some 12 in number, were destroyed on the ground on August 23] and the good work of the Joint Planning Staff sent to Greece," noted Wavell, "the embarkations were carried out according to plan except in two places. At Nauplion on the night of 26th-27th April, some 1,700 personnel had to be left behind owing to one of the ships, which had been set on fire by enemy bombing, having blocked the channel… Another merchant ship which conveyed troops from this place was bombed and set on fire soon after leaving Greece and two destroyers which picked up the survivors from the ship were both sunk by bombs within a few minutes of each other. Some 700 troops are believed to have lost their lives. These were practically the only casualties during the voyage from Greece."

The second failure occurred at Kalamata on the night of April 28th-29th. Poor planning, communication errors, and a rapid German advance, which saw a small enemy force enter the town and reach the quayside just as embarkation was due to begin, resulted in some 8,000 men, including 1,500 Yugoslavs, being captured.

By the time that the evacuation from Greece was terminated, close on 43,000 men, from a total of 57,660 originally sent to the country, had been safely re-embarked. However, mirroring the events at Dunkirk the previous year, all guns, transport and equipment were lost. "In view of the complete enemy air superiority," added Wavell, "the re-embarkation of so many troops may be considered an extremely fine performance. It was due to the magnificent work of the Royal Navy, the good staff arrangements made by those concerned, and the discipline and endurance of the troops themselves."

Wavell noted that "the expedition to Greece was ill starred from the first". In a few short weeks it had left him in an unenviable position. "The situation in the Middle East at the beginning of May was full of anxiety," he concluded. "I was threatened with having to undertake operations simultaneously in no fewer than five theatres with my resources in men and material very seriously depleted by the losses in Greece."

Palls of dense black smoke, from oil tanks set alight by Greek and British troops before their withdrawal, rise into the sky over Salonika shortly before the Germans occupied the city. (National Museum of the US Navy)

The Greek battleship *Kilkis* pictured having been sunk at the Greek naval base at Salamis during Luftwaffe air attacks on April 23, 1941. The photograph was taken from a Heinkel He 60 seaplane after the base was captured by German troops. Note the bomb damage to the nearby pier. (USNHHC)

THE SIEGE OF RAF HABBANIYA

The Middle East, with its vast reserves of oil, should have been the theatre upon which World War Two hinged. Yet Hitler was slow to appreciate the global nature of the war he had started. Britain's Chiefs of Staff, by contrast, grasped the importance of the Arabian oil fields. So, aware of growing anti-British sentiment in Iraq, the first Commonwealth troops arrived in the country on April 16, 1941. Reinforcements followed over the next few days. The 20th Indian Brigade, for example, was put ashore at Basra, its mission being to occupy the city and thereby secure oil supplies through the Persian Gulf.

This prompted Iraqi nationalists to mount a coup against the British-sponsored regime that ruled in Baghdad. Encouraged by promises of German and Italian support, the revolutionary forces also moved against the main British airbase, RAF Habbaniya, which was 55 miles from the Iraqi capital, with the aim of driving the British out of their country once and for all.

The first of the besieging Iraqi troops were in position near the airfield before dawn on April 30. By May 1, this force had swollen to some 9,000 men and included an entire infantry brigade, two mechanised battalions and a mechanised artillery brigade. Led by Colonel Fahmi Said, the Iraqi troops sent the following message to Habbaniya's commanding officer, Air Vice-Marshal Harry Smart: "For the purposes of training we have occupied the Habbaniya hills. Please make no flying or the going out of any force or persons from the cantonment. If any aircraft or armoured car attempts to go out it will be shelled by our batteries, and we will not be responsible for it."

An RAF officer examines the wreckage of Iraqi artillery that had been attacked by RAF aircraft during the siege of Habbaniya. (via Historic Military Press)

Smart obviously could not comply with the Iraqi demands. He replied in the strongest terms: "Any interference with training flights will be considered an 'act of war' and will be met by immediate counter-offensive action. We demand the withdrawal of the Iraqi forces from positions which are clearly hostile and must place my camp at their mercy."

Arab Legionnaires guard the landing ground beside the H4 pumping station, on the Iraq Petroleum Company's pipeline in Transjordan, as Gloster Gladiators of 94 Squadron refuel during their journey from RAF Ismailia in Egypt on May 8, 1941. These fighters had been despatched to Iraq to reinforce the garrison at RAF Habbaniya. On arrival at Habbaniya these aircraft formed No.1 Flight of 'A' Squadron for operations against the Iraqi armed forces. (Australian War Memorial; 008152)

An aerial view of RAF Habbaniya as it appeared in 1941.

News of these worrying developments were sent to Baghdad. Smart's defending forces consisted of a contingent of 1,199 Kurdish and Assyrian levies, 364 men of the King's Own Royal Regiment (Lancaster), and 18 World War One vintage armoured cars of No.1 Armoured Car Company RAF. Habbaniya was also home of No.4 Service Flying Training School, and the aircraft based there included two squadrons of Hawker Audaxes, a squadron of Fairey Gordons, three squadrons of Airspeed Oxfords, and a squadron of Gloster Gladiators. Altogether there were 64 serviceable aircraft, but just 39 pilots available. This meagre force was joined by ten Wellingtons flown in from Cairo.

Smart decided that he would send the Iraqis an ultimatum to withdraw from the plateau surrounding the airfield. Earlier he had received a message from Winston Churchill, which at least made the Prime Minister's views clear: "If you have to strike, strike hard. Use all necessary force."

With no response to his ultimatum, Smart attacked at dawn on May 2, every available aircraft being deployed to bomb Iraqi positions at 05.00 hours. The Iraqis returned fire on their attackers, as well as began shelling the airfield itself.

Throughout the rest of the day, and into the next, the battle raged on. Sortie after sortie led to the RAF's resources gradually dwindling. Help, though, was on its way, with a force being assembled in Palestine to rush to the relief of the besieged airbase. "A commitment in Iraq is inevitable," Churchill told the Chiefs of Staff that day, May 3. "We have to establish a base at Basra and control that port to safeguard Persian oil… It is essential to do all in our power to save Habbaniya and to control the pipeline to the Mediterranean."

Before dawn on May 4, Habbaniya's aircraft, supported by the serviceable Wellingtons, were again in the air continuing their attacks upon the plateau. The Wellingtons also targeted the Iraqis' Raschid airfield, bombing and strafing aircraft on the ground.

In total, Habbaniya War Cemetery contains 292 burials. A memorial within the cemetery commemorates an additional 106 soldiers and RAF levies who died while serving in Iraq during World War Two and who were buried in remote and un-maintainable graves. This picture, showing an RAF Corporal inspecting the headstones, was taken in 1944. (Australian War Memorial)

The defenders at Habbaniya received an unexpected boost when four Blenheim bombers flew in from Cairo. Further help for the garrison came with the discovery of a pair of 18-pounder field guns which had been used in the Mesopotamian campaign during World War One, and which had been sitting idle at Habbaniya for years. Royal Artillery gunners were flown up from Shaiba and after many hours managed to bring the guns back to working order. Now, the defenders could strike at the Iraqis from the ground as well as the air.

The King's Own also sent out fighting patrols to drive back Iraqi troops attempting to establish advance positions closer to the airfield's perimeter, as all the while the RAF continued to bomb and strafe the plateau. The Iraqis, in reply, maintained their shelling of Habbaniya. It was an odd kind of stalemate which, it appeared, could only end when the RAF there had no pilots or planes left.

Then, astonishingly, on the morning of May 6, the first reconnaissance flight of the day from Habbaniya reported that the Iraqis were leaving the plateau and withdrawing towards Falluja. Though outnumbering garrison at Habbaniya by at least eight to one, the Iraqis never mounted a serious ground assault upon the airbase.

RAF Habbaniya was constructed on the west bank of the Euphrates and opened on October 19, 1936. It remained an operational airbase until May 31, 1959, when the RAF was finally forced to withdraw following the Iraqi Revolution in 1958. This was the Rest and Leave Centre at RAF Habbanyia. (With the kind permission of W N Mansfield)

Many of the Commonwealth personnel killed during the fighting in Iraq during May 1941 were buried in the cemetery within the RAF cantonment at Habbaniya. This is the entry gate to Habbaniya War Cemetery pictured in May 2007. In total there are 60 casualties from this period buried there. This number includes 14 men of the King's Own Royal Regiment killed at Fallujah on May 23, 1941. (With the kind permission of Andy Dincher)

On hearing the remarkable news, every aircraft that could be flown was ordered up from Habbaniya with instructions to attack the columns of withdrawing Iraqi personnel. The aerial onslaught lasted for two hours. It left the road "a strip of flame hundreds of yards long, with ammunition limbers exploding and civilian and Army staff cars and troop transport trucks burning by the dozen".

A sortie by the King's Own then cleared a pocket of Iraqi troops stationed on high ground at Sin el Dhibben. It was the final act in the breaking of the siege of RAF Habbaniya. The Iraqis lost an estimated 1,000 men in the battle. The British garrison, for its part, had suffered 13 men killed and 21 badly wounded.

LIVERPOOL'S MAY BLITZ BEGINS

The Liverpool-Birkenhead conurbation had come under attack on ten occasions during 1940, particularly on November 28. Then came a period of calm lasting through the first ten weeks of 1941, when the Luftwaffe concentrated its attention against other targets – such as Clydebank and Plymouth as we have already seen. For Liverpudlians and those living in the surrounding areas, that respite came to an abrupt end on the evening of March 12, 1941, when they suffered the heaviest attack of all.

The Luftwaffe, though, was far from done with Liverpool. In the first eight days of May 1941, for example, Merseyside was bombed almost every night. It was the start of what became known as Liverpool's 'May Blitz'. In the course of this series of attacks, a combined total of 681 aircraft dropped some 870 tonnes of high explosive and more than 112,000 incendiaries on Liverpool. The results were predictably devastating, as one witness, William McGuire, then an 11-year-old schoolboy, recounted to National Museums Liverpool. On May 4, he had accompanied his father to the city: "We walked down to the museum in time to see the smoke billowing out from the museum which had been hit the previous night and it was absolutely frightening to look round it… it was horrendous, rubble everywhere."

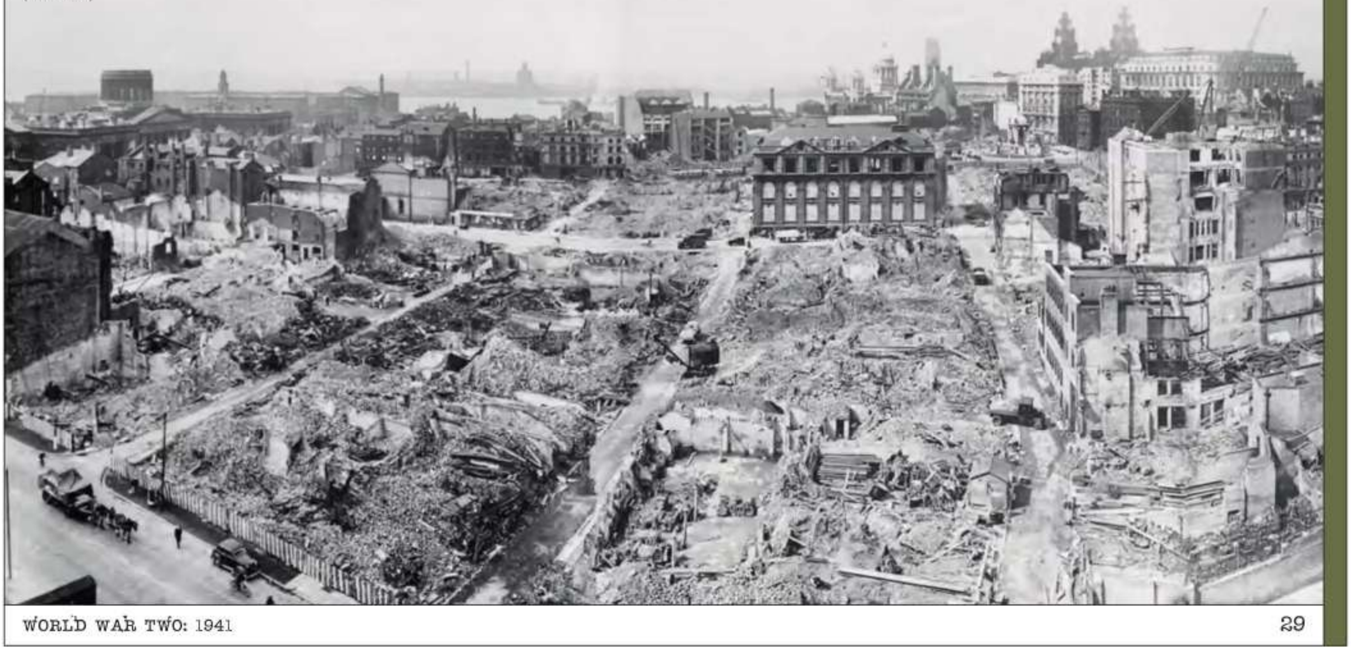
Coming on the back of previous attacks, the bombs compounded the situation that already existed in Liverpool. As the Imperial War Museum notes, "during the height of the May Blitz, conditions in communal air raid shelters were said to be 'indescribable'. During the raid on Bootle on 8 May, all but one of the town's rest centres for air raid victims were destroyed. Civil Defence workers were among the casualties across Merseyside. These included 28 Air Raid Precautions (ARP) wardens and Women›s Voluntary Services (WVS) workers killed and 14 seriously injured. Nearly 70 out of 140 berths in Liverpool's docks were put out of action. Many roads and rail routes through the city were also blocked. Tonnages of cargo handled at the docks were substantially reduced. Two main electricity generating stations were damaged as were all main telephone lines."

Located at the junction of Berry Street and Leece Street in Liverpool, St Luke's Church was bombed in 1941, since when, known locally as the 'Bombed-Out Church', it has had no roof. (Joe Dunckley/Shutterstock)

Such was the damage wrought across Liverpool, that Churchill observed that if the raids had persisted, then the Battle of the Atlantic, on whose outcome Britain's very survival depended, "would have been even more closely run than it was". In all, 1,900 people were killed, 1,450 seriously wounded and 70,000 made homeless; in Bootle, 8,000 out of 17,000 houses were destroyed or damaged during the Blitz as a whole. For its part, the May Blitz represents the most concentrated series of aerial attacks on any British city area outside London during World War Two.

Though its residents would not have known it at the time, the Luftwaffe's attacks on Liverpool at the beginning of May were some of the final acts of the Blitz. Within days, a last, huge attack on London would mark the end of Hitler's aerial offensive against the United Kingdom.

A panoramic view of the city of Liverpool, showing bomb damage received during the Blitz. The Liver Building can be clearly seen just to the right of centre, and the River Mersey is just visible to the left of the photograph. (IWM D5984)



A view of a Beaufighter Mk.IF night fighter, in this case X7583, but similar to that flown by Cunningham during his royal interception, in flight in 1941. (Historic Military Press)

A ROYAL INTERCEPTION

In June 1940, 604 Squadron, led by Squadron Leader John Cunningham, moved to Middle Wallop to take on the night fighter role. In October, 604 was re-equipped with the Bristol Beaufighter, and within a month scored its first night-time success when Cunningham engaged a Junkers Ju 88 over the Midlands.

Soon Cunningham, along with his regular radar operator, Sergeant Jimmy Rawnsley, had claimed a further eight aircraft, including three Heinkel He 111s in a single night. Cunningham was awarded the DSO, and to the British press he became known as "Cat's Eyes Cunningham".

In the first week of May 1941, RAF Middle Wallop was advised a royal visit was imminent. The King and his entourage duly arrived late in the afternoon of May 7. After dinner in the Mess, the three squadrons at Middle Wallop lined up for a royal inspection. Dusk was approaching as the men of 604 Squadron turned out in their best uniforms for the King. Walking along the line, the King stopped when he reached Rawnsley and asked him what his "score" was. "Er – nine, sir". "Nine, eh?," replied King George. "Will you get another one tonight for me?"

The King takes a moment to speak with Cunningham during his visit to Middle Wallop on May 7, 1941. Later that night Cunningham would provide the King with a first-hand demonstration of the growing strength of the RAF's night fighter units. (Historic Military Press)

After the inspection, the King was driven to the Ground Controlled Intercept (GCI) radar station which, codenamed *Starlight*, was located in the valley of the River Avon near the village of Sopley in Hampshire. There he was to observe the night's events unfold.

As it transpired, Luftlotte 3 was indeed planning a major raid that night. A total of 346 German bombers took off from Germany to attack Liverpool and Hull. Having hurriedly completed their preparations following the King's departure, as soon as darkness had descended, Cunningham and Rawnsley were airborne.

One of the raiders bound for Merseyside, a Heinkel He 111 H-5 of 7/KG 27, was soon picked up by the operators at Sopley, and *Starlight* began guiding Cunningham towards his prey. Aware that the bomber was heading directly towards his location, the Controller at Sopley, Squadron Leader John Brown, directed the chase with skill, though he literally had the King looking over his shoulder.

Gradually the Beaufighter closed in on its target, all the while getting ever closer to Sopley. Aware of how the pursuit was unfolding, Brown suggested to the royal party that if they stepped outside, they might just be able to see something of the impending duel above.

Finally, the Heinkel was in range and Cunningham opened fire. Almost immediately an orange glow began to spread along its fuselage, before it burst into flames. Its undercarriage flopped limply down, and the stricken aircraft shuddered and jerked. It pitched forwards and began to fall head-first towards the ground.

Down at Sopley the King and his party stared into the sky. They heard the deep growl of aircraft above and then the stutter of the guns. Moments later they saw the burning bomber falling from the sky. The Heinkel crashed at Andersea Farm, Westonzoyland in Somerset, at 23.30 hours.

THE CAPTURE OF U-110

A three-rotor Enigma machine similar to that seized from *U-110*. (Rob Atherton/Shutterstock)

Bound for a number of ports on America's East Coast, the 38 ships of Convoy OB318 had sailed from Liverpool on May 2, 1941. Seven days later, the merchant ships were spotted by the U-boats of the Wolfpack codenamed *West*. The first enemy submarine to strike was *U-110*. At 11.38 hours, *U-110*, which was commanded by Kapitänleutnant Fritz-Julius Lemp, who, as the captain of *U-30*, was responsible for sinking the SS *Athenia* in the opening shots of the Battle of the Atlantic on September 3, 1939, unleased its first spread of torpedoes.

In the moments that followed, Lemp and his crew claimed two victims, the SS *Bengore Head* and the SS *Esmomd*, in the icy waters of the Atlantic east of Cape Farewell in Greenland. These victories, however, sealed *U-110*'s fate.

A number of the Convoy's escorts immediately began converging on the spot where it was believed the attacker would be lurking. It would seem that Lemp, in his eagerness to confirm his 'kills', left *U-110*'s periscope up for longer than was necessary. It, or its wake, was spotted by a look-out on the Flower-class Corvette HMS *Aubretia* from a distance of 800 yards. *Aubretia* raced into the attack, delivering a full pattern of depth charges. They were the first of a veritable barrage that rained down on the U-boat.

The damage caused to *U-110* was so extensive – "the plates that formed the deck of the control center, which normally butted one another, overlapped from the pressure," noted the historian David Kahn – that she was forced to the surface. Another of the Royal Navy escorts, HMS *Bulldog*, then opened fire with its guns. With no other option, Lemp ordered his crew to abandon ship. As the German seamen poured out of the hatches, *Bulldog*, along with HMS *Broadway*, closed in. Any attempt by Lemp's crew to scuttle *U-110* failed. Seizing the opportunity, a boarding party, under the command of Sub-Lieutenant David Balme, was promptly despatched by HMS *Bulldog*, its members managing to get aboard the stricken submarine.

As their crewmates watched from a distance of barely 100 yards, Balme's small team struggled back up from the U-boat's control room clutching a collection of assorted documents and equipment. For example, "in one anxious moment," continued Kahn in his book *Seizing the Enigma*, *Bulldog*'s captain, Lieutenant Commander Addison Cresswell, "saw Able Seaman Claude Wileman stagger from the conning tower protecting an armful of documents with his body". In a matter of hours, the boarding party had transferred to safety *U-110*'s entire Enigma package – a fully functional coding machine, codebooks, keybooks, rotor settings, charts and other cryptological records.

Although taken under tow, *U-110* flooded and sank about 100 miles from Iceland the following day. Lemp was killed in the action on May 9, though the exact circumstances of his death remain unclear. The material seized from inside *U-110* proved vital to the work undertaken by the codebreakers at the Government Code and Cypher School at Bletchley Park in Buckinghamshire.

The main house at Bletchley Park, home to the Government Code and Cypher School in World War Two. It was there, and in the many buildings within its grounds – some of which have survived – that much of the Allies' important code-breaking work was conducted. Among the benefits the codebreakers there derived from the material captured in *U-110* was the cracking of the *Reservehandverfahren*, a reserve German hand cipher. (Shutterstock)

THE SALVATION ARMY
THE RELIANCE BEN

Firemen play their hoses on dying embers in buildings along Queen Victoria Street on the morning of May 11, 1941. (Historic Military Press); Inset: Another image showing firefighters battling the flames in Queen Victoria Street during the raid on the night of May 10/11, 1941. The international headquarters of the Salvation Army is on the right. (Historic Military Press)

THE END OF THE BLITZ

Late on the evening of May 10, the Luftwaffe launched its last major raid of its night Blitz against the United Kingdom. No effort was spared by Goering's bombers in their attempt to pound the British capital as hard as possible – though the people of London had already endured the longest aerial bombardment the world had ever known.

To achieve a total of 541 individual sorties, some of the German crews even undertook two or three missions in the course of the night. While in theory their main targets were all of the bridges across the Thames to the west of Tower Bridge, factories on the south side of the Thames, warehouses at Stepney, and the railway line that ran north from Elephant and Castle, in reality much of the capital suffered severely at the hands of attackers.

Announcing the imminent arrival of the raiders, the sirens had first begun their "awful warbling-like sound of a howling wolf", as London resident Joan Veazey described it in her diary, at 22.53 hours in Croydon. In Westminster it was exactly 23.00 hours and in Kennington it was two minutes past the hour. It was at 23.02 hours that the first of the incendiaries began to fall through the moonlit sky.

For hour after hour, death and destruction rained down. Doug Bowerman was in bed at a block of council flats at 60 Halton Road, Islington, when he felt the effects of the Blitz first-hand: "About midnight… I heard the biggest bang I have ever heard in my life. Blast does funny things, and, in this case, I was sucked out of bed, along the hall passage and finished up against the wall of the living/dining room or where it had been."

The last bomb to fall was timed at 05.37 hours on the morning of the 11th – It landed on Scotland Yard. The 'All Clear' sounded a short while later at 05.50 hours. The 2,932 high explosive bombs, 72 oil-bombs and 77 parachute mines, along with a staggering 86,173 incendiaries, had caused the death of 1,436 Londoners; a further 1,800 people were seriously injured across London. More than 12,000 were left homeless.

The bombs and incendiaries started in excess of 2,000 separate fires, nine of which were classified as "conflagrations" and 20 as "major". Together, these fires consumed an area of about 700 acres of central London and left a total of 959 roads blocked – it is estimated that this constituted a third of the city's streets.

Every main line railway terminus was put out of action. National institutions such as the British Museum, Lambeth Palace, the Law Courts, the Public Record Office and Westminster Abbey were among the buildings also damaged. Over 150,000 people were left without gas, water or electricity, while more than 5,000 houses were destroyed, with a similar number of buildings being severely damaged.

HESS PARACHUTES INTO SCOTLAND

As the afternoon of May 10, 1941 wore on, and the Luftwaffe groundcrews and armourers completed their preparations that would allow some 500 bombers to undertake their last attempt at crushing London in the Blitz, a somewhat different scene was being played out at the Messerschmitt airfield at Augsburg-Haunstetten.

At 17.45 hours, a brand-new, specially prepared Messerschmitt Bf 110 was taxiing out for take-off. It was crewed only by a pilot – an individual who was neither a member of Messerschmitt staff nor a Luftwaffe airman. He was in fact the Deputy Führer, Rudolf Hess.

Once airborne Hess turned northwards on the start of a 900-mile journey that would end some five hours later in the skies over Scotland. It was not until 22.10 hours that Hess' lone aircraft was picked up approaching the British coast off Northumberland. Flying at a height of 12,000 feet, as he neared Holy Island, Hess jettisoned his under-wing fuel tanks. As radar continued to plot the 110's course, it was given the designation 'Raid 42'.

Thirteen minutes later, as the first night fighters were being directed towards the potential raider, Hess was over land. His presence was detected, and reported, by the efficient personnel on duty at the Royal Observer Corps (ROC) post at Embleton. As the minutes ticked by, Hess flew on, his route continually being monitored by radar and those on the ground. Just after 22.30 hours, he was spotted visually by two ROC posts in quick succession – both reported that the aircraft in question was a Bf 110.

A similar sighting was made minutes later by the observers at the ROC post at West Kilbride. Somewhat dramatically, their message, notes the historian Derek Wood in his book *Attack Warning Red*, pointed out that the 110 "had just shot through the local village at 25ft". From their vantage point on a hill top, the post's crew "had clearly seen every moon-lit detail, right down to the black crosses on the wings".

For Hess, though, his flight was about to end. At 23.09 hours, after the 110 had been plotted following a haphazard course out to sea and then back inland, an ROC post on the edge of Eaglesham Moor in Renfrewshire made, continues Wood, the following report: "One man has just baled out and looks to be landing safely". Moments later: "Plane has come down out of control and crashed in flames."

Incredibly, Hitler's right-hand-man, at least in terms of his Nazi Party rank, was standing on British soil. His aircraft crashed at Floors Farm on Bonnyton Moor. The first person he encountered was not a policeman or member of the local Home Guard, both of which had promptly been altered by the ROC sector operations room, but a local farmer, David McClean.

"I was in the house that night and everyone else was in bed, for it was late," McClean later recalled, "when I heard a plane roaring overhead. As I ran to the back of the farm, I heard a crash and saw the plane burst into flames in a field about 200 yards away.

Hess, the pilot, sat in the cockpit of his aeroplane talking to his wife and Bruno Loerzer after his victory in the flying race around the Zugspitze, Germany's highest peak, in March 1934. (Both Polish National Archives)

Hess climbing into the cockpit of a Bf 110. (via Historic Military Press)

The wreckage of Hess' Bf 110 under guard on May 11, 1941. (via Historic Military Press)

"I was amazed and a bit frightened when I saw a parachute dropping slowly downwards through the dark. Peering upwards I could see a man swinging from the harness. I thought it must be a German airman baling out, and raced back to the house for help. But they were all asleep.

"I looked round for a weapon. All I could find was a hay fork. Fearing I might lose the airman, I hurried round by myself again to the back of the house. There in the field I saw the man lying on the ground, with his parachute nearby.

"He smiled. As I assisted him to his feet he thanked me in perfect English. But I could see he had injured his foot in some way. I helped him into the house. By this time my old mother and my sister had got out of bed and made tea. The stranger declined tea and smiled when we told him we were very fond of it in this country. Then he said, 'I never drink tea as late as this. I'll only have a glass of water.'

"We sent word to the military authorities. Meantime our visitor chatted freely to us and showed us pictures of his little boy, of whom he spoke very proudly. He told us he had left Germany about four hours earlier, and had landed because nightfall was approaching… he was a striking looking man, more than six feet tall, and he wore a very magnificent flying suit."

Several minutes after landing by parachute a local Home Guard platoon arrived to take control before eventually transporting Hess to their headquarters at Busby. After several telephone calls, he was moved to Merryhill Barracks in Glasgow under escort by men of the 11th Cameronians (Scottish Rifles). Though Hess initially claimed to be one Hauptmann Alfred Horn, it was not long before his true identity was established.

An Army officer inspects the wreckage of Hess's aircraft at the crash site. (Historic Military Press)

Hitler was at the Berghof when he was handed a letter by Hess' adjutant, Karlheinz Pintsch. In it, Hess outlined his actions and his intention to open peace negotiations with the UK, seemingly fearful that Germany would not be able to win a war on two fronts. The Führer was incandescent with rage – he reportedly let out a cry so loud that it was heard throughout the building.

It was Munich Radio which made the first public announcement about Hess' flight. On the evening of May 12, the Germans broadcast that Hess, "apparently in a fit of madness", had taken possession of an aircraft contrary to Hitler's orders and had disappeared. It was only after this broadcast that the British press realised that the mysterious parachutist who had landed in Scotland was in fact the Deputy Führer, and the story broke around the world.

In the end, Hess' efforts at trying to broker a peace negotiation between Britain and the Third Reich came to nothing. Hess remained in custody for the remainder of the war. Tried and found guilty at Nuremberg, he remained in prison for the rest of his life.

The section of fuselage from Hess' Bf 110 which is on display in the Imperial War Museum. (Historic Military Press)

PALACE OF WESTMINSTER UNDER ATTACK

The Houses of Parliament had long been on the Luftwaffe's list of targets, but so far throughout the Blitz the seat of the British Government had survived relatively unscathed. This time, however, they would not escape; as the last attack of the Blitz played out across London, the first incendiaries and bombs struck the Palace of Westminster at 00.36 hours on May 11.

The roof of the Ministry of Works was set on fire and in the back room of the Royal Court on the 4th floor the contents were damaged. At the same time, Westminster Hall was struck, as was the House of Commons itself. One of the bombs killed two auxiliary policemen, Arthur Stead and Gordon Farrant, who had been on duty at their posts in the octagonal stone turret located at the south-east corner of the Royal Gallery.

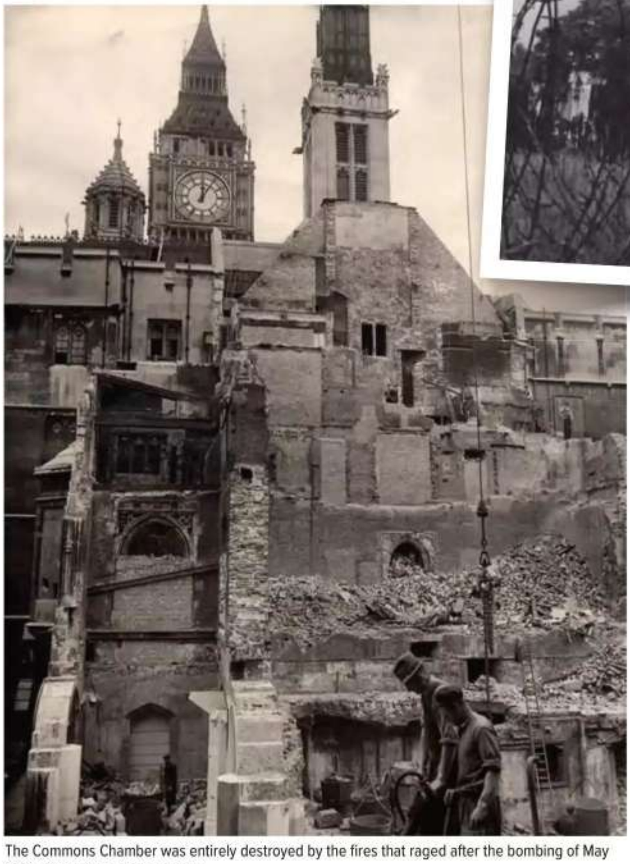
As the minutes ticked by, the fires began to spread. The Victoria Tower, which had been surrounded by scaffolding since 1936, was soon alight, the wooden planks on the scaffolding having been set alight by incendiaries. Two other bombs then fell on the Palace, one of which caused damage to the Peers' Inner Court, filling the courtyard with rubble. Vast blocks of masonry were hurled into the Royal Courtyard.

The other bomb fell through the slate roof over the principal doorkeeper's room of the House of Lords and crashed through the ground floor and into the kitchen below. The bomb failed to explode but the tremendous rush of air ripped the heavy iron door from its hinges and flung it into the adjoining room where the 54-year-old resident superintendent, Captain Edward Elliot, was sheltering with his wife and child. The heavy door hit Elliot, who was killed instantly.

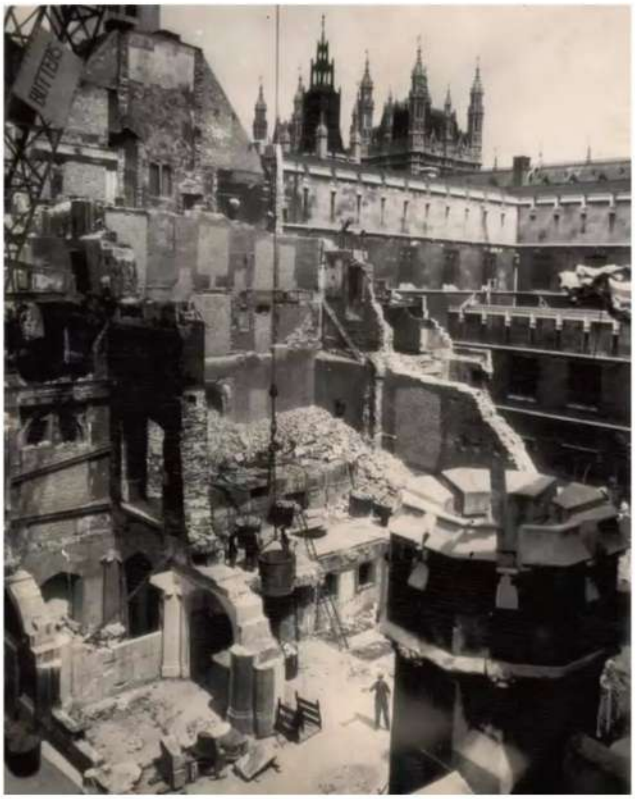
One of the many firemen directed to the Palace of Westminster was the BBC reporter Robin Duff, who had enrolled as a part-time fireman. Once on scene, he and his colleagues set about trying to contain the raging fires. Suddenly, Duff later recalled in a broadcast he made two days later, "There was a terrific crash above our heads". He went on to add: "Big Ben and the whole clock tower were enveloped in a thick cloud of black smoke. Rubble was falling all around us and for a moment we feared that the tower had crashed to the ground. But when the smoke and dust had cleared away we could see that at least was safe."

That said, the glass of the southern clock face had been shattered by a falling high explosive bomb. The 1859 London landmark lost a half second and its chimes were temporarily put out of action. But both Big Ben and the main clock mechanism survived.

A view of the Clock Tower at the House of Commons during the war, with an armed sentry and barbed wire defences in the foreground. (Historic Military Press)



The Commons Chamber was entirely destroyed by the fires that raged after the bombing of May 10/11, 1941. (Historic Military Press)



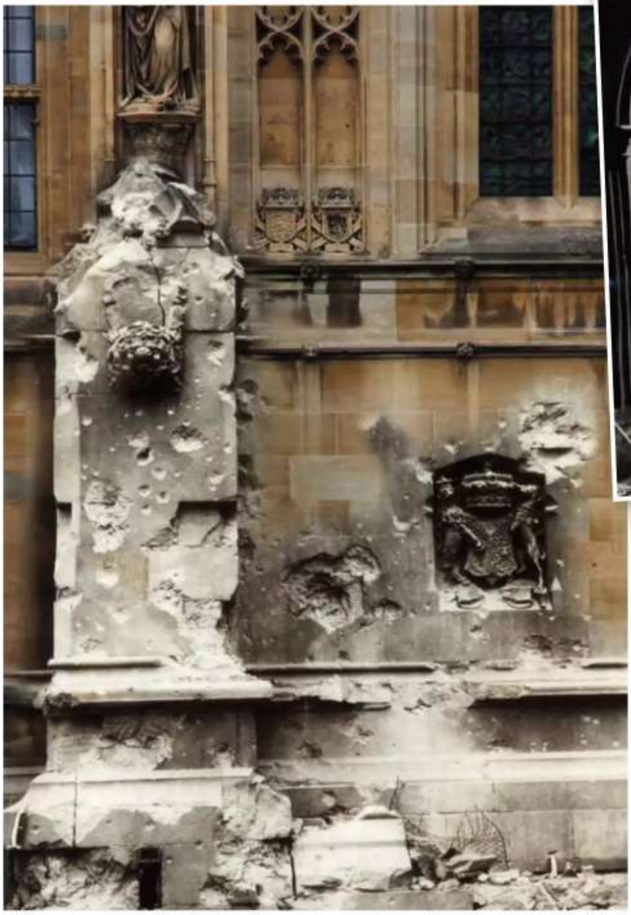
The original caption to this image states that it was taken from the area of what would have been the Strangers' Gallery, or public gallery, of the Commons Chamber. (Historic Military Press)

Another individual who battled to save the Palace in the early hours of May 11 was Police Sergeant Alec Forbes. Working alone, Forbes slung a sandbag over his shoulder and began to climb the scaffolding ladders that led up the 300-foot-high Victoria Tower. With the contents of his sandbag he put out fire after fire as he climbed up the successive levels of the scaffolding. When he reached the seat of the fire, he realised that a team led by Chief ARP officer Victor Goodman had been fighting the same fires, but from inside the tower. Forbes merely shrugged and retraced his steps, still carrying the sandbag.

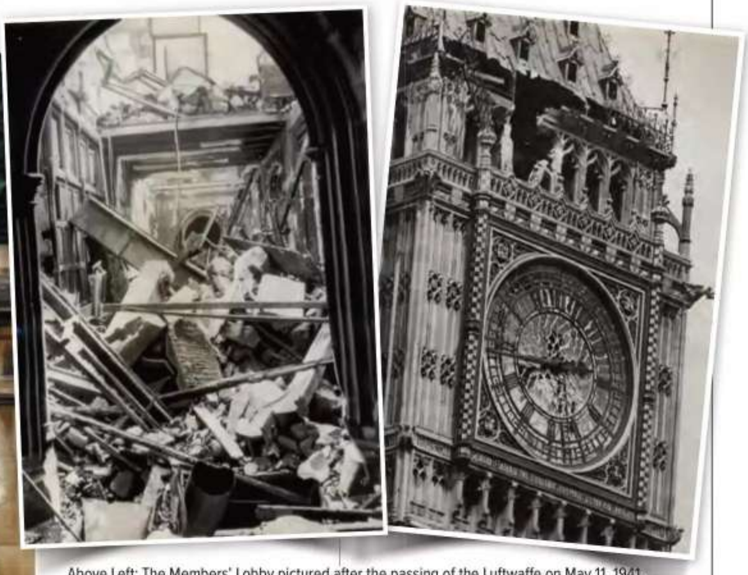
Duff, meanwhile, was still at work elsewhere at the Palace. "Bursts of flames shot up from Westminster Hall and from the whole length of the Chamber of Commons," he continued in his broadcast. "More pumps were ordered onto the job and every man there was working feverously. Some were fighting the fire from the tower courtyard and a few of us went up to a passage joining cabinet ministers' offices with the Chamber.

"Our work was to see that the flames didn't spread across that passage. We found two hydrants and got the hoses to work through the doorway behind the Speaker's chair. Very soon there was a great rumbling, ending in a crash. A delayed action bomb had exploded inside the burning building [this was the bomb that had hit, but bounced off, the Big Ben tower] and the outer wall of the Chamber had been hurtled into the courtyard below.

"There must have been about thirty men in that courtyard when the wall came down. It was filled with huge blocks of stone, and it looked as though there wasn't more than a square foot anywhere where a man could have lived. But the only damage done was one badly sprained arm."



A 'then and now' image that shows bomb fragment damage to one of the walls in the Old Palace Yard. (Historic Military Press/Robert Mitchell)



Above Left: The Members' Lobby pictured after the passing of the Luftwaffe on May 11, 1941. Above Right: A photograph showing the damage caused when a bomb tore a hole in the face of Big Ben during the bombing on May 11. (Both Historic Military Press)

It was in the cold light of day that the true extent of the damage to the Palace of Westminster became clear. A reporter for the *Nottingham Evening Post*, whose account was published on May 12, wrote: "Blackened water dripped down our backs as we groped our way down dark corridors, in which last week MPs were eagerly discussing the Prime Minister's speech and the events of the war. Glass crunched beneath our feet as we came to the gutted rooms behind the Speaker's chair – no trace of which could be found now – and standing with precarious foothold, looked at the unrecognisable mountain of rubble and ruin which four days ago was the thronged Debating Chamber."

Among other parts of the Palace, the Debating Chamber, the Press Gallery, and the Strangers' and Ladies' galleries had all been destroyed. This, though, did not interrupt the Government's proceedings, and from late June 1941 until October 1950, the Commons met in the Lords Chamber, while the Lords met in the Robing Room, a fact which was kept secret during the war.

Despite the death and destruction wrought across the whole of London that night, the attacks marked what one historian later referred to as "the Luftwaffe's last fling" in the Blitz. Hitler, for his part, now had his sights firmly fixed on the East.

HOME GUARD AT BUCKINGHAM PALACE

Born out of the fear of a German invasion in the spring of 1940, the formation of the Local Defence Volunteers was officially announced by Anthony Eden, the Secretary of State for War, in his famous broadcast made on the evening of May 14 that year. In it he called for British subjects to enrol in the new formation. The Government had expected 150,000 people to come forward, but by the end of May almost 400,000 had put their names down to join what would become a vast military organisation.

On June 26, 1940, Churchill wrote to the Secretary of State for War suggesting that the LDV be renamed the Home Guard. This was officially confirmed on July 23. Over the months that followed, the Home Guard continued to grow and develop. So much so, in fact, that on March 25, 1941, it was confirmed that its strength stood at a staggering 1,600,000 men, "of whom a million possess rifles or machine-guns". It was the latest volunteer force ever raised in the United Kingdom.

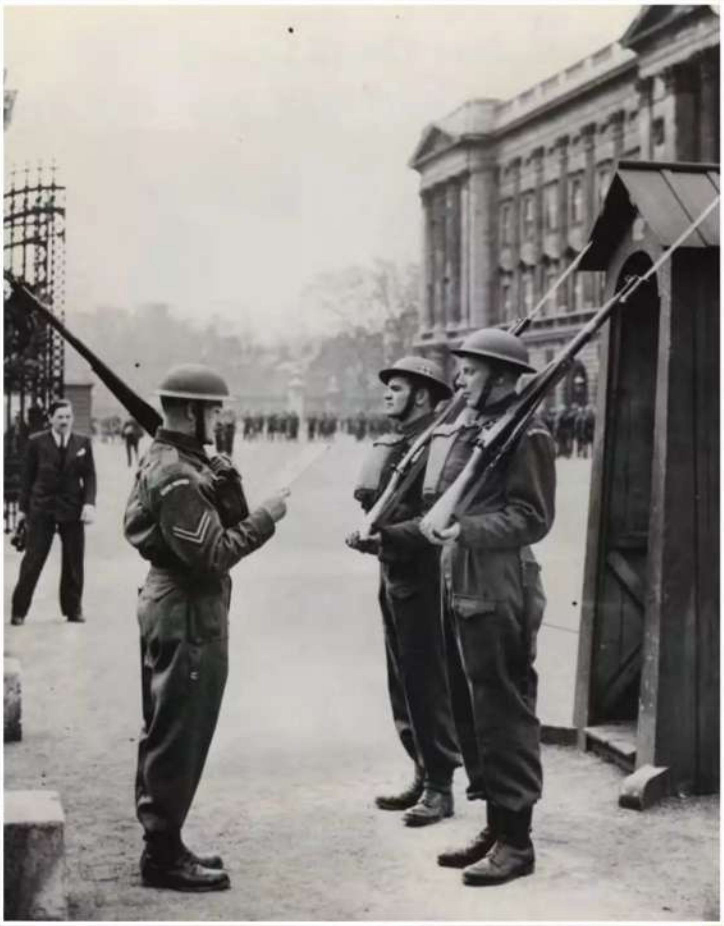
Following a suggestion originally made by King George V, the Home Guard mounted guard at Buckingham Palace in honour of its first anniversary. The following account of the event on May 14, 1941, was published in *The Scotsman* the next day:

"On the anniversary of the formation of the Home Guard, a detachment, headed by the band of the Grenadier Guards, marched through the gates of Buckingham Palace yesterday, to take over the King's guard from the Scots Guards. It was the first time the Home Guard had mounted guard at the Palace.

"Drawn from the First County of London (Westminster) Battalion, the men marched and drilled with the precision of veterans. The King came out of the Palace to watch them go through the time-honoured evolutions. After the Guard Commander, Captain Charles Brown, who in private life is a City business man, had saluted the Scots Guards commander, the two officers went over to where the King was standing with General Eastwood, Commander-in-Chief of the Home Guard, and General Sir Bertram Sergison-Brooke, G.O.C. London District.

"The King shook hands with the Guards officer and with Captain Brown, and had a long talk with him. The King walked over to where the Home Guard was drawn up facing the old guard, and inspected the ranks, stopping, now and then, to talk to some of the men. Outside the railings, there was a big crowd, including relatives of some of the men on parade. Five members of the Palace staff were among the Home Guardsmen." The latter would have been members of No.4 (Buckingham Palace) Company, 1st County of London (Westminster) Battalion, Home Guard. The company was composed of members of the Royal Household and servants employed in the Palace.

As part of the anniversary commemorations, the King published a statement in which he said that the Home Guard were to be thanked "for the service they freely give at considerable sacrifice of leisure and convenience".



Members of the Home Guard on duty at Buckingham Palace, May 20, 1941. This was repeated on May 20, 1943. (Historic Military Press)

A Home Guard exercise underway in London during August 1941. The original caption states: "Home Guards attack the Admiralty in exercises. A Home Guard detachment has successfully defended the Admiralty from an attack from two War Office companies of the same organisation, even though it was all just an exercise in military tactics. In this photo two of the defenders hurl hand grenades as members of the attacking party approaches." (Historic Military Press)

It was 19.40 hours on Thursday, May 15, 1941, that Flight Lieutenant Philip E 'Gerry' Sayer, the Gloster Aircraft Company's chief test pilot, taxied into position at the end of RAF Cranwell's runway. Sayer gradually advanced the throttle until, as the engine reached 16,000 rpm, he released the brakes, allowing his aircraft to accelerate forward.

With little information to work from, Sayer used his instincts, drawing heavily on the feel of the aircraft itself, to judge when the moment had arrived for him to pull back on the control column. As the aircraft's speed reached about 80mph, and having covered around 700 yards of runway, it gradually lifted into the air. The prototype of Gloster's E.28/39, the first British jet powered aircraft, had taken off on its official maiden flight.

During the flight, Sayer achieved a top speed (Indicated Air Speed) of 240mph and reached an altitude of 4,000 feet. He landed safely back at Cranwell after 17 minutes. The BAE Systems website notes that the "handling was reported as being 'light and responsive', although throttle response was said to be sluggish".

With the serial number W4041, and code letter 'G', the E.28/39 prototype, sometimes known as the Gloster Whittle or the Gloster Pioneer, had been designed and built to serve as a platform to flight test the new jet engines that had been developed by Frank Whittle and his company, Power Jets Ltd., since 1936. The Air Ministry specification was first issued to Gloster on February 3, 1940. In order to avoid the risk of bombing at the main Gloster factory, W4041/G, designed by George Carter, was built under top secret conditions at the Regent Motors' factory in Cheltenham.

The aircraft completed its first ground running trials at Brockworth on April 7, 1941. These taxiing trials continued the following day, during which W4041/G actually experienced a number of brief initial hops off the ground. With these trials successfully completed, W4041/G, fitted with revised nose landing gear, was dismantled and moved by road to RAF Cranwell where it was handed over to the team which included Flight Lieutenant Sayer.

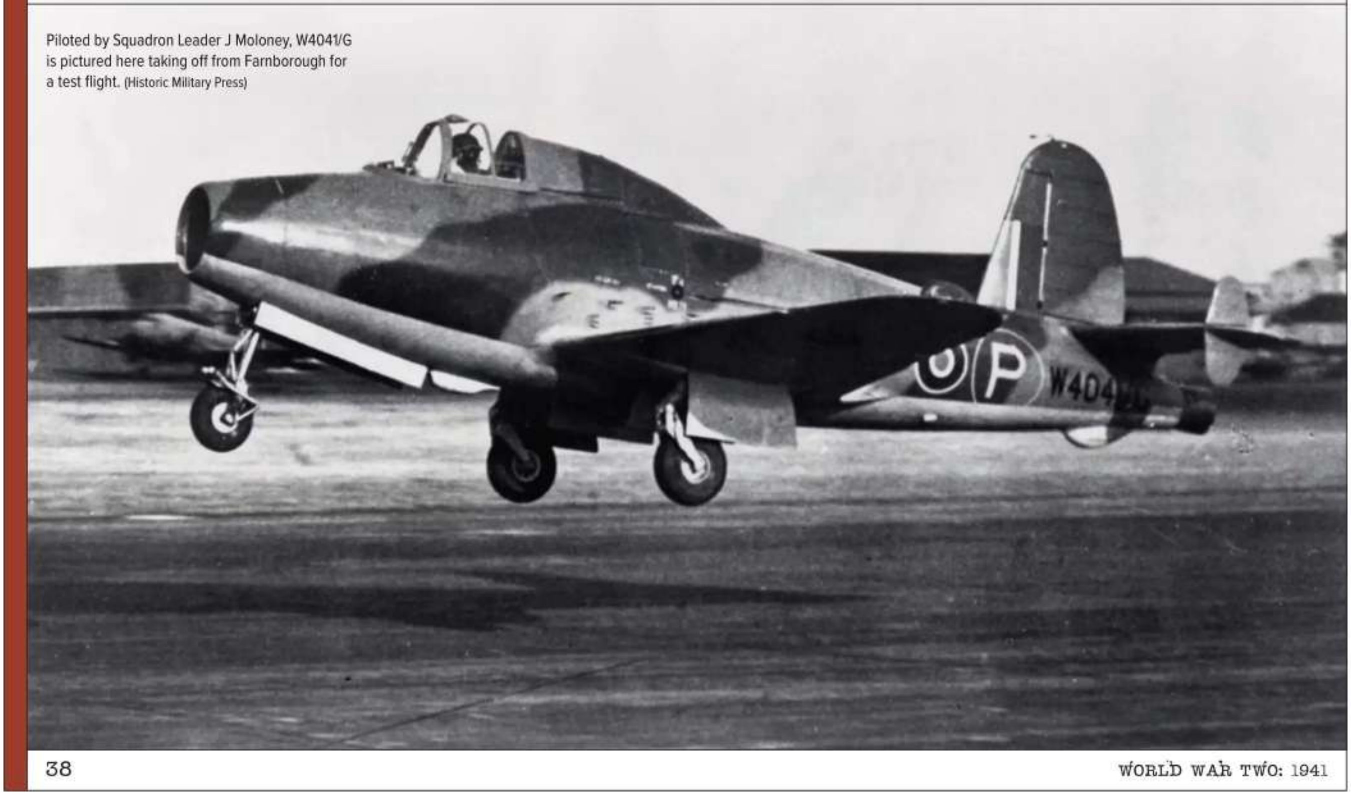
W4041/G has survived and is on display in the Science Museum in London. (Courtesy of Alan Wilson)

Over the next 13 days, a total of 10 hours of flying was completed, following which the prototype was returned to the factory to await the fitting of a new and more powerful engine – one of a number that would be fitted to the airframe over the years. In due course, W4041/G was transferred to the Royal Aircraft Establishment at Farnborough. Once there it was flown by the RAE's own test pilots, who duly "reported favourably on the new form of propulsion".

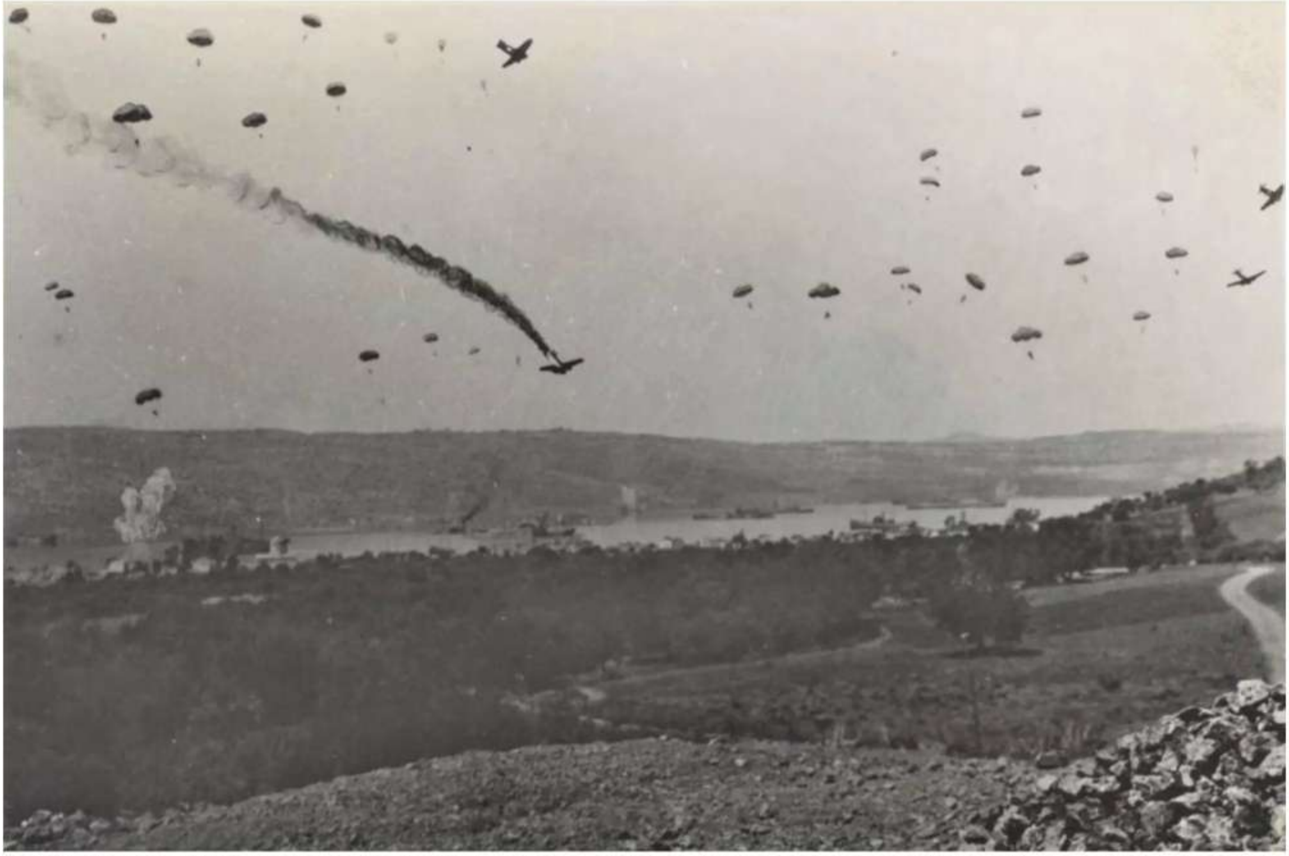
Though the E.28/39 was the first Allied jet, it was not the first jet-powered aircraft to fly – that honour had fallen to the German-built Heinkel He 178 in August 1939. It was in fact the fourth non-operational jet to fly, the other two being the Italian Caproni Campini N.1, airborne in 1940, and another German design, the Heinkel He 280, which first flew earlier in 1941.

FIRST BRITISH JET-POWERED FLIGHT

Piloted by Squadron Leader J Moloney, W4041/G is pictured here taking off from Farnborough for a test flight. (Historic Military Press)



HITLER INVADES CRETE



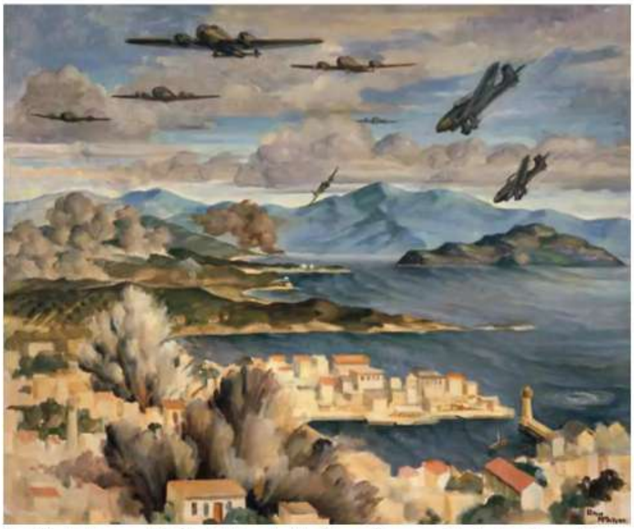
Fallschirmjäger descending over Suda Bay. On the morning of May 20, 1941, Luftwaffe dive bombers and fighters of von Richhofen's VIII Air Corps subjected the Maleme, Canea and Suda Bay areas of Crete to heavy bombing and strafing attacks. At 08.00 hours the first gliders began landing near Maleme airfield and on the beach near Canea. At the same time around 2,000 parachutists jumped. (Historic Military Press)

British and Commonwealth forces had occupied Crete following the Italian invasion of Greece on October 28, 1940. The possession of Crete was welcomed by the Royal Navy as the harbour of Suda Bay provided an excellent base from where it could operate against the Axis forces in the eastern Mediterranean. There was really no likelihood of any Axis naval vessels finding their way past the Royal Navy.

When the decision was made to evacuate British and Commonwealth forces from mainland Greece in April 1941, the men expected to be transferred to Egypt. However, the need to get as many men as possible away from the mainland resulted in roughly 27,000 troops being transported to Crete to allow the ships to make a quick return to pick up more men. This resulted in a defence force being assembled, albeit without heavy artillery or sufficient small arms, to defend the strategic island, which, including the existing garrison, amounted to approximately 30,000 men. With support from some 10,000 hastily-recruited Greeks, the land forces were considered by some to be adequate to face the numbers which the Germans could attack with. However, Major-General Bernard Freyberg VC, the New Zealander who was handed command of Creforce, the Allied forces on the island, did not agree. "Forces at my disposal are totally inadequate to meet [the] attack envisaged," he told his theatre commander, General Wavell. "Unless fighter aircraft are greatly increased… I cannot hope to hold out with our land forces alone."

On April 25, 1941, Hitler ordered the invasion of Crete – Directive No.28, otherwise known as Operation *Mercury*. Because of the strength of the Royal Navy, the only way the Germans could mount an assault was by air, much as Freyberg had feared. It was the first time that the Fallschirmjäger (paratroopers) were to be used en masse.

It was almost a month later, on the morning of May 20, that the first Fallschirmjäger of the Luftwaffe's 7th Parachute Division began landing near Maleme airfield, which they captured the following day. As soon as Generaloberst Kurt Student, the commander of XI Fliegerkorps, was aware that his men had taken the airfield he ordered the Luftwaffe to fly in reinforcements – regardless of the cost in terms of men or machines. A bitter battle raged as the Allies struggled to regain the lost ground, while the enemy was summoning all his strength to retain the airfield.



A painting by the war artist Peter McIntyre that depicts the German aerial attack on Canea at the start of Operation *Mercury*. (Archives New Zealand)

German mountain troops, or Gebirgsjäger, wait to board the Junkers Ju 52s that will transport them to Crete to reinforce the Fallschirmjäger. (Danish National Museum)

Gebirgsjäger pictured in a Junkers Ju 52 during the flight to Crete. Some 220 of the 600 Ju 52s used in *Mercury* were destroyed. (Danish National Museum)

Throughout the 21st, the Junkers Ju 52 transports flew through machine-gun and artillery fire to land their human cargoes. Aircraft after aircraft arrived on the island; many crashed on the nearby beach and some were hit as they disembarked their troops.

As the day wore on the battle for the airfield hung in the balance. The turning point came that evening with an attack against Malerne by two New Zealand infantry units, the 20th Battalion and the 28th (Maori) Battalion. This force struck at night, but by this time the original German paratroopers had set up defensive lines and the newly-arrived reinforcements – crack mountain troops or Gebirgsjäger – proved difficult to dislodge. The attack slowly petered out and the Allies failed in their bid to retake the airfield.

It was on the hills skirting Maleme, around the hilltop town of Galatas, that some of the most intense fighting for Crete would occur. The Germans could make no impression upon the defences in that area on that first day. They renewed their assault on the 21st. "In the late afternoon we attacked Galatas once again," recalled Feldwebel Karl Neuhoff, "and once again the attack failed with heavy casualties and we were forced to retire to the prison area. It was particularly noticeable that a very large proportion of our casualties had been shot in the head. This fact, and the controlled fire and discipline or the enemy, led us to believe that we were up against a specialist force of picked snipers, of whose strength we had no accurate idea but which we judged to be far greater than ours."

Nevertheless, Day Three saw the Germans expanding the ground they held, the Allied troops being forced to withdraw southwards. Despite their fierce resistance, Freyberg's men were driven further back over the course of the following days as increasing numbers of German troops reached the island. The fall of Malerne had been a pivotal moment in the battle for Crete.

Allied troops being rounded up and searched after their capture on Crete. (Danish National Museum)

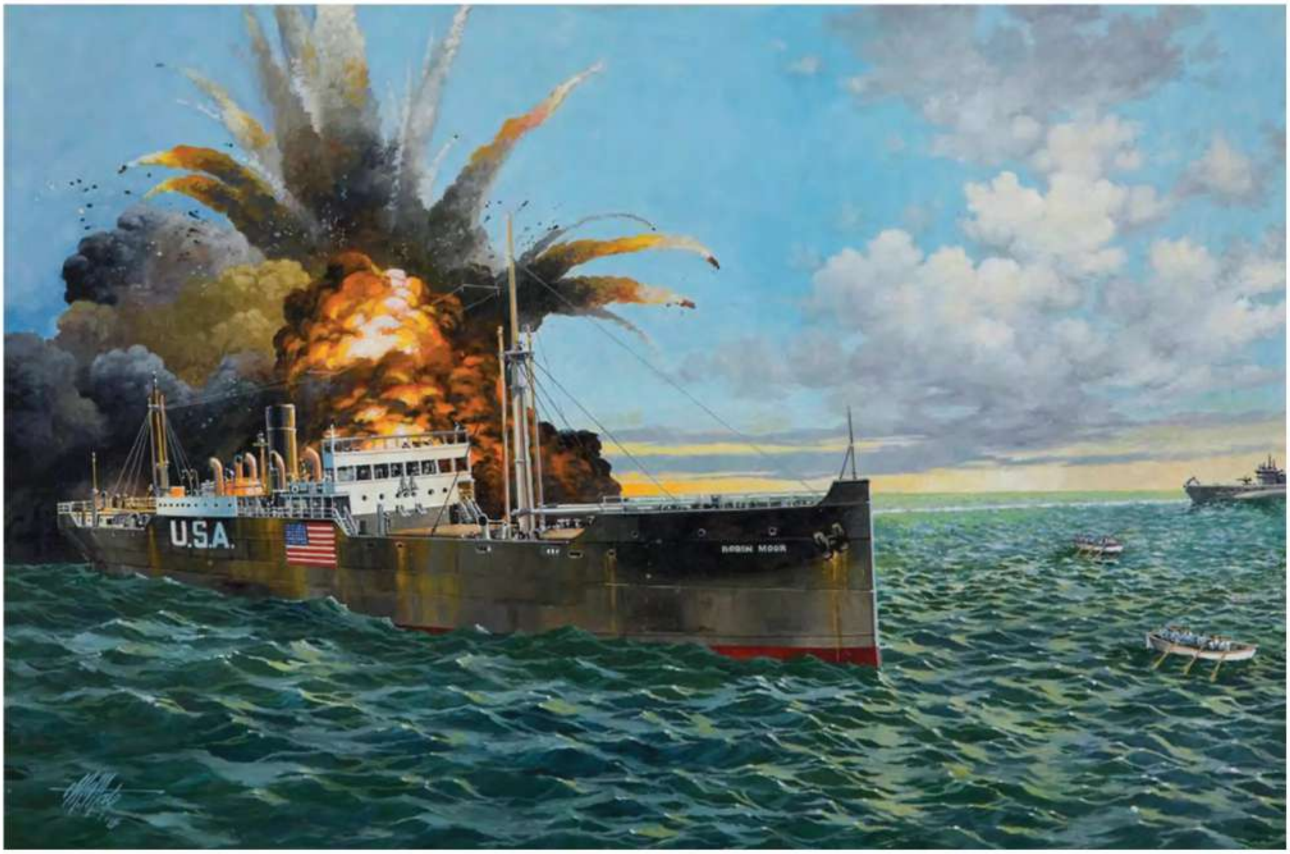
General Auchinleck, Commander in Chief of the Middle East Forces, presents Lieutenant Colonel Howard Karl Kippenberger with the Distinguished Service Order, for his actions on Crete, during the investiture of members of a New Zealand brigade in the Western Desert, November 4, 1941. (National Library of New Zealand)

The Kiwis clung onto Galatas for six days until, on the afternoon of May 25, the Germans attacked in force following an intensive mortar bombardment and aerial bombing. This onslaught reached a terrific climax about 16.00 hours. For more than two hours the New Zealanders continued to hold their line intact. Then the lines flanking the town broke and disaster threatened as troops began to run. This resulted in Lieutenant Colonel Howard Karl Kippenberger's famous rallying call being heard on the eastern side of Galatas: "Stand for New Zealand, anyone of you who is a soldier. Stand for New Zealand."

A rout was avoided and into the fray came two companies, 'C' and 'D' from the 23rd Battalion, to augment those forces still on the scene. In the end, extreme German pressure forced a fighting withdrawal and Galatas finally fell.

Eventually, on May 27, the evacuation of the Allied forces was ordered; the same day that the first Italian units arrived on Crete. Some 16,000 men were rescued by the Royal Navy and taken to Egypt over the course of the next four days. The last of the remaining troops surrendered on June 1. The British and Commonwealth troops had fought well, as had indeed the Greeks, but the aerial superiority enjoyed by the Germans proved in the end to be the decisive factor.

However, losses among the invaders had been severe, amounting to more than 6,500 dead, wounded or missing – compared to 3,478 casualties suffered by the British and Commonwealth forces. It was, as Generaloberst Student observed, "A disastrous victory". Never again would Hitler order the mass use of airborne troops.



A painting depicting the sinking of *Robin Moor* on May 21, 1941. (American Merchant Marine Museum)

SS ROBIN MOOR SUNK

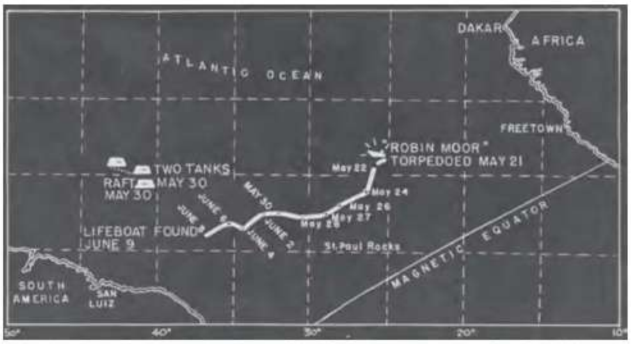
With the Battle of the Atlantic raging on, the growing presence of United States' warships and merchantmen inevitably led to confrontations with Axis submarines. The first American-owned ship sunk by a U-boat, the Panamanian-flagged *Charles Pratt*, had been torpedoed in the South Atlantic by *U-68* on December 21, 1940. The next victim, SS *Robin Moor*, was sunk on May 21, 1940.

With a crew of nine officers and 29 men, as well as eight passengers, the freighter was steaming unescorted across the Atlantic bound for Mozambique. Loaded in her hold was a general cargo that included "items of every conceivable description". Among this were a number of cars and trucks, steel rails, tools, agricultural chemicals, over 48,000 gallons (of lubricant in drums, cases of shotgun shells, and a few .22 calibre rifles destined for private customers.

At 05.25 hours on May 21, *Robin Moor* was some 750 nautical miles west of Freetown, Sierra Leone, when she was spotted by *U-69*. Kapitänleutnant Jost Metzler's crew ordered *Robin Moor*'s captain to heave to. Those on board were ordered into the merchant ship's four lifeboats, following which the U-boat crew provided them with rations.

After a short while, *U-69* submerged and fired a single torpedo from its stern torpedo tube. This slammed into *Robin Moor*'s port side amidships. She started to sink, but far too slowly for Metzler's liking. Having observed *Robin Moor*'s lingering demise for about 40 minutes, Metzler ordered his crew to surface. His gunners then manned the U-boat's 88mm deck gun and fired a total of 39 rounds at the stricken freighter. Within 17 minutes, it had finally slipped beneath the waves.

Though the lifeboats initially stayed together, after three days one of them drifted away. The 35 occupants of the three boats that had remained in contact were spotted and rescued by a Capetown-bound British ship, SS *City of Wellington*, on June 3. By this time, they had covered about 600 miles in 13 days. They were all landed at Capetown on June 18. The ten crew members and one passenger in the fourth lifeboat had to wait until June 9 for their rescue, finally being picked up by the Brazilian freighter *Osorio*. They were all landed two days later at Recife, Brazil.



A chart that shows the course taken by one of the lifeboats carrying survivors from *Robin Moor* before they were eventually located and rescued. (USNHHC)

Predictably the incident resulted in a ratcheting up of tensions between the neutral United States and the Axis Powers. In a message to Congress on June 20, 1941, President Roosevelt declared that the Third Reich had "flagrantly violated the right of the United States" and was trying to "drive American Commerce from the ocean".

President Roosevelt went on to state that *Robin Moor*'s destruction constituted a "warning to the United States" that it "may use the high seas of the world only with Nazi consent". He concluded by declaring the following: "Were we to yield on this we would inevitably submit to world-domination at the hands of the present leaders of the German Reich. We are not yielding, and we do not propose to yield."

Pictured from *Prinz Eugen*, this image shows *Bismarck* in a Norwegian fjord on May 21, 1941, shortly before departing for her Atlantic sortie. The location is probably Grimstadfjord, just south of Bergen, where the battleship anchored at 11.00 hours that day. (USNHHC)

THE BATTLE OF THE DENMARK STRAIT

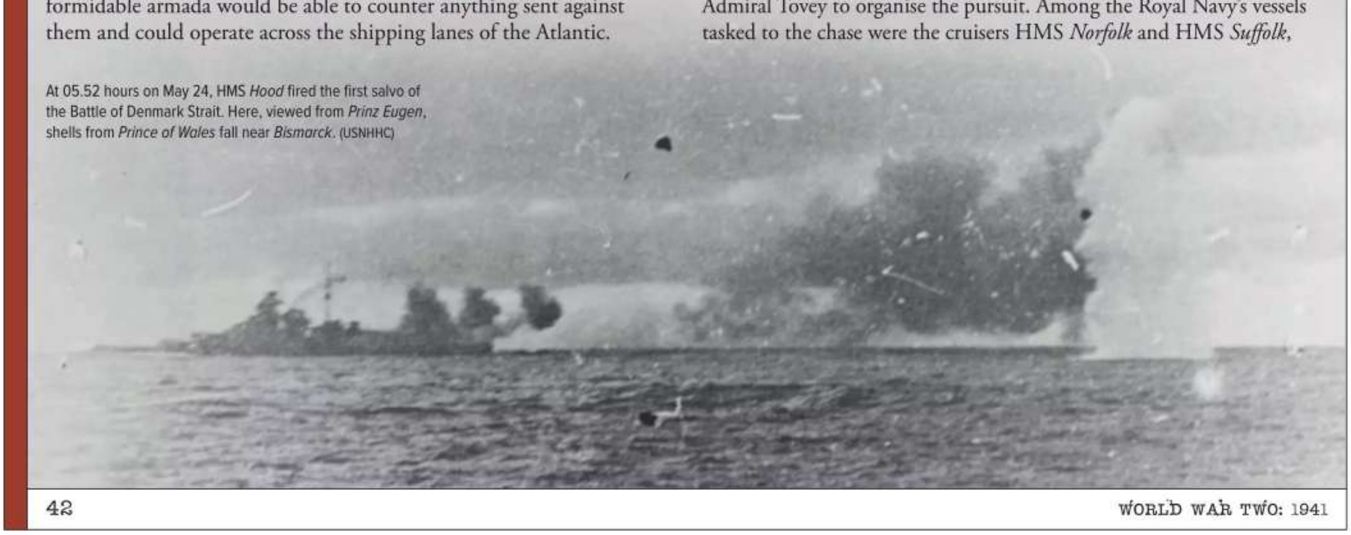
Having been commissioned on August 24, 1940, the battleship *Bismarck* was, along with her sister ship *Tirpitz*, the largest battleship ever built by Germany. She was also one of the most formidable warships constructed by any European power. If a vessel of her capabilities was able to slip into the enormous expanse of the Atlantic, she could do serious harm to Allied shipping. Worse, with a top speed of over 30 knots she could outpace almost any of the Royal Navy's capital ships that would be sent after her. It was, therefore, only a matter of time before she entered the fray – particularly so following the publication of Führer Directive No.23 on February 6, 1941.

Grossadmiral Erich Raeder, the head of the Kriegsmarine, called the resulting plan Operation *Rheinübung* ("Rhine Exercise"). Originally the idea was to involve both *Bismarck* and *Tirpitz* sailing together with *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*, all four being accompanied by a force of cruisers and destroyers. Sustained by supply ships and oilers this formidable armada would be able to counter anything sent against them and could operate across the shipping lanes of the Atlantic.

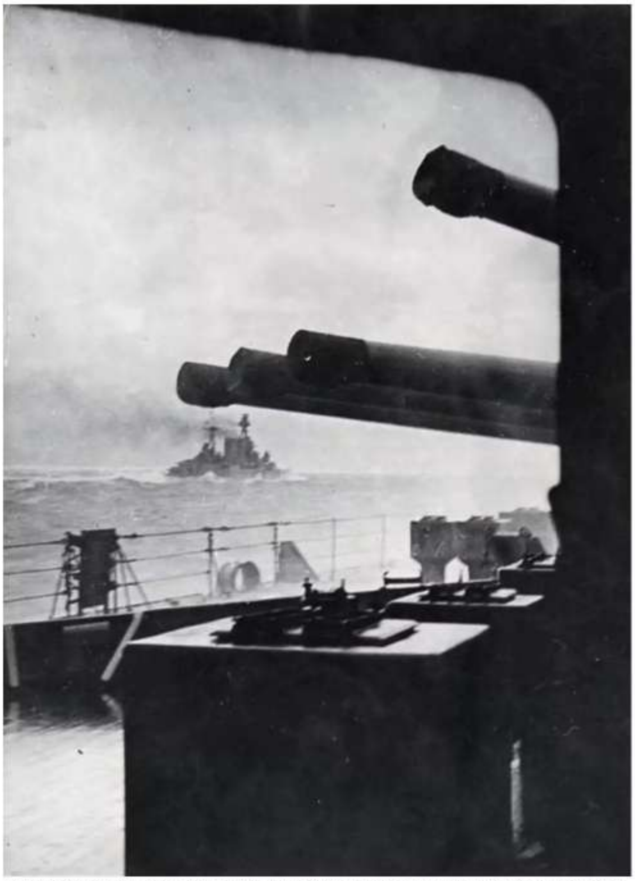
Unfortunately for Raeder, Hitler demanded that *Rheinübung* must take place before the invasion of the Soviet Union, which had been planned for the summer of 1941. Though *Tirpitz* had been completed in February 1941, it was clear that she would not be fully operational in time. Raeder's scheme was dealt a further blow when *Gneisenau* was, as we have already seen, badly-damaged by the RAF, while *Scharnhorst* was beset by engine troubles. This left Raeder with just *Bismarck* and one brand-new heavy cruiser, *Prinz Eugen*. It was not enough, but plans were nevertheless laid for the two warships to head out into the North Sea.

At 12.00 hours on May 18, 1941, *Bismarck* pulled away from her berth in Gotenhafen, and moved out into Kiel Bay where she completed embarking the final supplies and stores. In the early hours of the following morning the great battleship weighed anchor and put to sea. Her destination was the shipping lanes of the North Atlantic.

The hunt was soon on – though the British, able to read the Kriegsmarine's codes, already had an inkling of what was afoot. It fell to Admiral Tovey to organise the pursuit. Among the Royal Navy's vessels tasked to the chase were the cruisers HMS *Norfolk* and HMS *Suffolk*,



At 05.52 hours on May 24, HMS *Hood* fired the first salvo of the Battle of Denmark Strait. Here, viewed from *Prinz Eugen*, shells from *Prince of Wales* fall near *Bismarck*. (USNHHC)



HMS *Hood* going into action against *Bismarck* and *Prinz Eugen* on May 24. Taken from HMS *Prince of Wales*, this was the last photograph ever taken of *Hood*.

Bismarck opens fire on *Prince of Wales* and *Hood* during the Battle of Denmark Strait. The photographer is on *Prinz Eugen*, which was in the lead. It was at 05.55 hours when *Bismarck* fired its first salvo at *Hood*. (USNHHC)

which had been patrolling the seas around Iceland, the new battleship HMS *Prince of Wales* and the battlecruiser HMS *Hood*. In her day, HMS *Hood* was one of the finest warships in the Royal Navy, though by the outbreak of World War Two she was no longer amongst the most modern of the capital ships afloat.

By the late afternoon of May 23, *Bismarck* and *Prinz Eugen* were moving south-westward through the Denmark Strait at high speed when they were sighted by *Norfolk* and *Suffolk*. Despite being fired on by *Bismarck*, the two British cruisers successfully shadowed the German force throughout the rest of the night. Meanwhile, reinforcements rushed to the scene.

At 05.35 hours the next morning, a lookout on *Prince of Wales* spotted *Bismarck* about 17 miles away. The opposing ships gradually converged and at 05.52 hours *Hood* opened fire at a range of 25,000 yards. She was followed shortly after by *Prince of Wales*.

The Germans responded two minutes later. Three shells from HMS *Hood*'s third salvo slammed into *Bismarck*. Three of the latter's forward sections began flooding, forcing her captain to reduce speed to about 28 knots.

For their part, *Bismarck* and *Prinz Eugen* concentrated their fire on *Hood*. The German aim was extremely accurate, and the enemy gunners' second and third salvos straddled and hit the battlecruiser. Fire broke out in *Hood*'s port battery, a blaze that spread rapidly.

At 06.00 hours *Hood* was straddled again. Exactly what happened next was the subject of two courts of inquiry and has prompted much continuing debate, but what is known for certain is that the ship was ripped apart by a massive explosion. With its guns tilted at a violent angle, *Hood* attempted to fire one more salvo from her forward turrets. Within 3 or 4 minutes she was gone.

Kapitänleutnant Burkard von Müllenheim-Rechberg, one of the artillery officers on *Bismarck*, subsequently recalled the tragedy: "At first the *Hood* was nowhere to be seen. In her place was a colossal pillar of black smoke reaching into the sky. Gradually at the foot of the pillar, I made out the bow of the battlecruiser projecting upwards at an angle, a sure sign that she had broken in two."

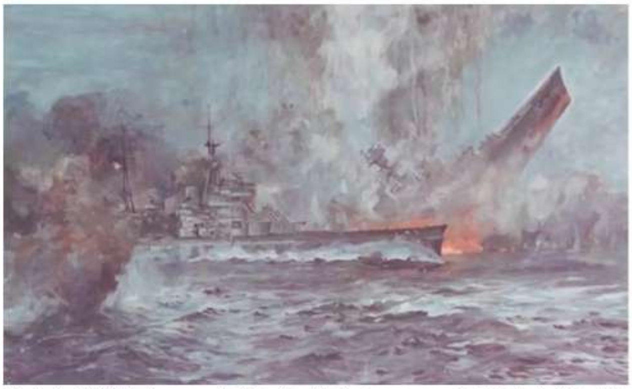
This disaster was witnessed by the crew of a Coastal Command Sunderland flying boat, L5798/Z of 201 Squadron. Commanded by Flight Lieutenant R J Vaughn, it had been ordered to take-off from its temporary base in Iceland late on May 23 to search for, and shadow, an enemy naval force.

As they arrived on the scene, Vaughn's crew observed gun flashes and duly reported that four ships appeared to be engaged in battle. At that time, the Sunderland's first wireless operator, Bam Martyn, was taking his turn in the rear turret, leaving the second operator, Les Archer, at the radio. Martyn later recalled that, "As we approached the ships we saw and heard, or perhaps felt, the gunfire before we had sorted out which group was British, and which was German. I have an abiding memory of the unbelievable flash of the explosion that killed *Hood* and the shock of the realisation that a ship had sunk."

Having despatched HMS *Hood*, *Bismarck* then engaged *Prince of Wales*, straddling and hitting the latter with the first salvo. Having sustained a fair amount of damage, *Prince of Wales* disengaged; *Bismarck* did likewise. As it turned out, this break in the action would prove to be temporary.

Of the 1,418 men on board HMS *Hood*, only three survived. It was the largest loss of life suffered by any Royal Navy warship.

At about 06.00 hours, one or more shells from *Bismarck*'s fifth salvo slammed into HMS *Hood*. Within three minutes, the pride of the Royal Navy had sunk. In fact, from her first salvo to her disappearance beneath the waves, just eleven minutes had passed. This is the view of *Hood* exploding as seen from *Prinz Eugen*. Smoke from *Prince of Wales*'s gunfire is faintly visible just to the left. (USNHHC)



The death of HMS *Hood* – as graphically depicted by the German war artist J C Schmitz-Westerholt. HMS *Prince of Wales* is in the foreground. Laid down in September 1916, *Hood* was the last battlecruiser built for the Royal Navy and between the wars was the largest warship afloat. (USNHHC)

SINK THE BISMARCK

Taken from *Prinz Eugen* on May 24, this is said to be the last photograph of *Bismarck* ever taken by the Germans. (USNHHC)

Even as the devastating news of HMS *Hood*'s loss began to spread, the pursuit of *Bismarck*'s battlegroup continued. Every available British warship was converging on the German force, including the aircraft carrier HMS *Victorious*.

Though buoyed by his success at sinking *Hood*, Admiral Günther Lütjens, who commanded the German battlegroup, knew that he could no longer continue with Operation *Rheinübung*. To carry on would render *Bismarck* highly vulnerable. Having disengaged from HMS *Prince of Wales*, Lütjens turned south-east hoping to join *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* in Brittany. As he tried to escape, *Prince of Wales*, *Suffolk* and *Norfolk* followed carefully.

On board HMS *Victorious*, Captain Henry C Bovell had hoped to get to within 100 miles of *Bismarck* before launching a strike with his torpedo-armed Swordfish. But with the weather turning against the pursuers, the aircraft took to the sky while 120 miles away; it was a little after 23.30 hours on May 24. The Swordfish located the German warships and pressed home their attack. One torpedo struck *Bismarck*, but it had little effect against the battleship's thick armoured belt.

In the darkness *Lütjens* then swung *Bismarck* round in a large circle, a move which completely fooled his pursuers. For now, *Bismarck* and *Prinz Eugen* disappeared. At the same time, Lütjens allowed his force to sperate. *Prinz Eugen* slipped away to the south, while *Bismarck* continued on towards France.

The German raiders had to be found, and the Royal Navy and RAF committed every possible resource to the hunt. At 03.30 hours on May 26, Pilot Officer Dennis Briggs took off from Lough Erne in Northern Ireland at the controls of a Consolidated Catalina, AH545 coded WQ-Z. After flying for six hours, the Catalina reached its search area out in the Atlantic.

It was at 10.30 hours, some 700 miles west of Brest, that Briggs' crew spotted their prey. Incredibly, there below them was *Bismarck*. "We were flying low at the time," Briggs later recalled. "I and the second pilot [Ensign Leonard B Smith of the US Navy, one of 17 American pilots then operating with Coastal Command] were sitting side by side and we saw the ship at the same time. At first, we could hardly believe our eyes. I believe we both shouted, 'There she is,' or something of the sort."

As his wireless operator was frantically transmitting news of their sighting, Briggs' Catalina came under fire from *Bismarck*'s anti-aircraft guns. But the vital news had been received. A second Catalina was already racing to join Briggs. En route it flew over a Royal Navy force which was heading towards the reported location "at full pelt through the heavy seas". The net was rapidly closing around Lütjens.

Bismarck photographed from *Prinz Eugen* on May 24, 1941, following the Battle of the Denmark Strait and before the two German ships separated. *Bismarck* is somewhat down by the bows, the result of hits received in her engagement with HMS *Prince of Wales* and HMS *Hood* earlier in the day. This is the second to last photograph of *Bismarck* ever taken by the Germans. (USNHHC)

During the attack on *Bismarck* on the night of May 24/25, 1941, 18 torpedoes were dropped against the battleship. The last struck in the area of the warship's foremast on the starboard side. It was the only hit and was of little significance. This picture probably shows the flash of flame and clouds of smoke at the time of impact and explosion. (USNHHC)

The Consolidated Catalina of 209 Squadron which, flown by Pilot Officer Dennis Briggs and his crew, made the crucial sighting of *Bismarck* on May 26, 1941. (Courtesy of the late Andrew Hendrie)

The end of the German battleship *Bismarck*. Taken from one of the pursuing Royal Navy warships, the German battleship can be seen on fire in the distance. (via Historic Military Press)

Survivors from *Bismarck* are pulled aboard HMS *Dorsetshire* on May 27, 1941. (Historic Military Press)

Try as he might, *Lütjens* could not shake off his pursuers. Next it was the turn of aircraft operating from HMS *Ark Royal*. The first attempt by Nos. 810 and 820 Naval Air Squadrons – who were airborne at the same time as Briggs and his crew were returning to base – nearly ended in disaster when they mistook HMS *Sheffield* for *Bismarck*. Luckily, none of the torpedoes hit the cruiser.

The second attempt by *Ark Royal*'s Swordfish was an astonishing success. The battleship was found by some of the aircraft and at least one torpedo struck its stern. Shortly afterwards *Bismarck* was seen to alter course and then steam round in circles – the torpedo had damaged the ship's rudder. She moved off slowly and unsteadily.

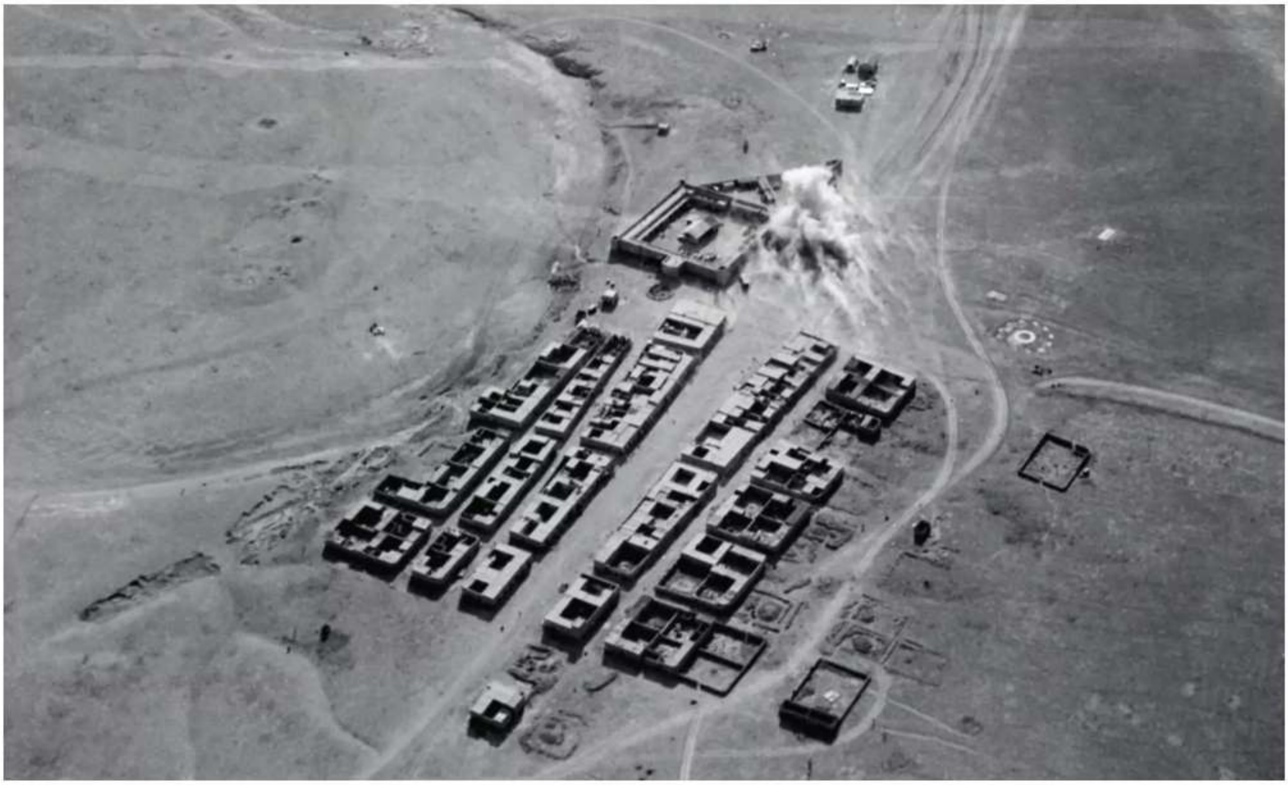
It was now just a matter of time before the Royal Navy finished off *Bismarck*. Tovey waited until daylight on May 27 before pressing home the final attack. *Bismarck* was spotted at a range of about 25,000 yards at 08.48 hours. As she was steaming directly towards them, HMS *Rodney* opened fire first at 08.47 hours. HMS *King George V* waited one minute more. *Bismarck*'s guns replied at 08.50 hours.

An account by the US Navy's Naval History and Heritage Command notes that *Bismarck* sustained her first hit at 08.57 hours: "Five minutes later a 16-inch shell from the *Rodney* apparently put the German battleship›s A and B turrets out of action. C and D turrets were firing on the *King George V* when a shell from one of the British warships carried away the rangefinder and paralyzed the control position. These exchanges took place at a range of about 20,000 yards. By 0020, range had been narrowed to 11,500 yards; 10 minutes later the *Bismarck* was on fire and virtually out of control, though her C and D turrets were still firing independently, and her secondary battery was in use."

The cruisers *Norfolk* and *Dorsetshire* joined in the relentless battering of *Bismarck*. "The upper deck was being pounded into a mass of twisted steel," continues the same account. "Hatches and doors were jammed in all parts of the ship. Crews in two magazines were drowned when it became necessary to flood the chambers because of fire. A direct hit crashed into a forward compartment where 200 men were trapped under jammed hatches. Fires on the gun deck cut off the forward half of the ship. The air was dense with smoke, fumes and the gases generated by the bursting shells. Paint was burning off the bulkheads and many men without gas masks were suffocated.

"By 1000 all the *Bismarck*'s 15-inch guns were out of action… *Rodney*, *King George V*, and the *Norfolk*… fired their last salvos from a range of only 8,300 yards. At 1010, out of the *Bismarck*'s entire armament, only one anti-aircraft gun remained workable. The ship was a wreck, on fire fore and aft, and wallowing heavily."

The British warships broke off the action at 10.22 hours. By 10.35 hours *Bismarck* had assumed a heavy port list, exacerbated by scuttling charges that had been fired, was capsizing slowly and sinking by the stern. HMS *Dorsetshire* then moved in and fired three torpedoes. It was the final act – at 10.39 hours *Bismarck*, the pride of Hitler's navy, slipped below the waves, stern-first.



A bomb bursts on Rutba Fort on May 9, 1941. An isolated outpost in the west of Iraq, the fort had been seized at the beginning of May by the Iraqi Desert Police. It was feared that, following German intervention, it might be used as a base to seize a nearby oil pipeline. As a result, on May 9 four Bristol Blenheims from 84 Squadron, operating out of Aqir in Palestine, attacked Rutba. After messages were dropped asking the Iraqis to surrender, which were ignored, each of the aircraft made two passes. The ground fire was so severe that each of the Blenheims was damaged. One, that flown by Flying Officer Goudge, was so badly damaged that it crash-landed on the return flight. (Australian War Memorial; 008156)

SURRENDER IN IRAQ

Though their defeat at Habbaniya was a major setback for the Iraqis, it did not end their revolt. Sporadic attempts continued to be made by the Iraqi Air Force against Habbaniya, but with little success. The British Air Striking Force, as the available RAF aircraft at Habbaniya were known, retaliated by attacking the Iraq airfields at Baquba, Shahraban, Khaniqin and Kirkuk, destroying 12 aircraft on the ground. The tiny, ill-equipped, inexperienced band of RAF pilots, with heroic efforts from the groundcrews under heavy fire, had won not just superiority but supremacy in the air. They were now able to extend their operations to attacking Iraqi ground forces wherever they encountered them. It looked all over for Rashid Ali al-Gaylani and his conspirators – but then enetered the Luftwaffe.

On May 6, after an appeal from the Iraqis nationalists for help in its fight against Britain, France's vice-premier, Admiral Darlan, agreed to let Hitler send German personnel to Iraq via Syria. From the German perspective, things moved quickly. Also on May 6, Oberst Werner Junck was informed that he was to lead the Luftwaffe's contingent of the German military mission to Iraq. Known variously as Sonderkommando Junck or Fliegerführer Irak, it was originally intended that this force would comprise of 12 Heinkel He 111s, 12 Messerschmitt Bf 109s, and up to 13 Junkers Ju 52 and Ju 90 transport aircraft.

A Junkers Ju 90, as used by Sonderkommando Junck. Along with the Junkers Ju 52s, those Ju 90s provided for operations in Iraq in May 1941 were ordered to be released at the earliest opportunity, their presence required for Operation *Mercury* – the German invasion of Crete. (Deutsches Bundesarchiv)

By May 9, the first Luftwaffe aircraft began staging through Syrian airfields, namely that at Aleppo. As well as providing the German aircraft with fuel, the Vichy French also sent weapons and ammunition to the Iraqis, as well as promised to train and arm Iraqi troops. Supported by an anti-aircraft section, the Sonderkommando Junck eventually reached its new base at Mosul. There, with their Luftwaffe markings quickly over-painted with Iraqi Air Force insignia, the first arrivals were gradually joined by the rest of the German aircraft that made the journey, though Junck's force never reached the levels intended a few days earlier.

Loaded with some 300 tons of French weapons and ammunition for the Iraqi forces, the Vichy French in Syria despatched their first train to Iraq at 10.00 hours on May 12. A second train, carrying a further 160 tons of supplies, departed two hours later. Each train was accompanied by a half company of the 16th Tunisian Tirailleurs. In all, five train loads were sent from Syria. When British intelligence became aware of this it was decided to cut the railway link. Early on the morning of May 24, a Vickers Valentine of 216 Squadron flew into Syria with a party of sappers, landing near Campaniya where the line from Aleppo crossed a high viaduct. The sappers demolished the bridge with explosives making their escape just as a Vichy armoured car reached the scene.

Even though the Iraqi siege of Habbaniya had been broken days earlier, it was from Mosul that Junck's crews first raided the RAF airfield on the morning of May 16. This attack was made despite an attack on Mosul by a lone Blenheim of 203 Squadron which was piloted by Flying Officer Lane-Sansome. In their first attack the Luftwaffe reputedly caused more damage than all the previous Iraqi strikes put together.

A Fordson armoured car of the RAF's No.2 Armoured Car Company halted outside Baghdad while negotiations for an armistice take place between British officials and the rebel government, May 30, 1941. This was the very day that the last remnants of the Luftwaffe's force in Iraq left the country. (via Historic Military Press)

Following the Allied forces' victory in Iraqi in 1941, they launched an invasion of Vichy French-held Syria. After the successful Battle of Palmyra on July 1, 1941, Allied troops found this wreck of a Heinkel He 111, formerly of Sonderkommando Junck, on Palmyra airfield. (Australian War Memorial; 021826)

British reinforcements continued to dribble in, with four Hurricanes flying into Habbaniya from Egypt on the 17th. Once again this meant that the RAF could strike back at the enemy in a meaningful manner. In just two days of aerial fighting that followed, a third of the Sonderkommando Junck was destroyed, either in the air or on the ground. A number of RAF personnel were killed in the bombing; a lone Gloster Gladiator that managed to get airborne and intercept the Heinkels was shot down, its pilot killed.

The Germans, however, were soon to be reinforced by the Italian Regia Aeronautica. If Hitler had been slow to recognise the importance of Iraq, Mussolini had not. In a meeting with von Ribbentrop, he is reported to have said: "The possession of Iraq and its oil wells might well have a more profound effect upon the British world position than a landing in the British Isles themselves."

The Italians, though, had waited until the Germans had committed themselves first. It was a fatal delay. Likewise, on May 27, Admiral Darlan signed the 'Paris Protocol', which not only gave Germany access to Syrian and Lebanese military facilities but also to naval bases at Tunis and Dakar. It was also a step that came too late, for the very same day the final British advance on Baghdad began.

Meanwhile, the British and Commonwealth relief force – Habforce – crossed more than 400 miles of desert roads from Transjordan. In the process it beat off an Iraqi attempt to block the British column's path. Soon it was bearing down on Baghdad. On the 30th, troops of the 4th Cavalry Brigade of 1st British Cavalry Division reached Baghdad.

The Luftwaffe losses had also continued to mount and despite the arrival at Mosul of a number of Italian Fiat CR.42 fighters, at 14.12 hours on May 30, the last serviceable German aircraft, a Junkers Ju 90, took off from Mosul and set course south-west for Palmyra in Syria. Sonderkommando Junck, or at least what was left of it, had abandoned Iraq.

Events such as these had gradually broken the Iraqi rebels' spirit. Rashid Ali al-Gaylani abandoned the Iraqi capital and, accompanied by German and Italian diplomats and the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, fled to Persia. At 04.00 hours on May 31, 1941, the Mayor of Baghdad signed an armistice on a bridge across the Washash Canal. Finally, on June 1, Prince Abd al-Ilah returned to Baghdad as the Regent and the monarchy, as well as a pro-British government, were put back in place.

"Hitler certainly cast away the opportunity of taking a great prize for little cost in the Middle East," Churchill told the House of Commons. "We in Britain, although pressed to the extreme, managed with scanty forces to save ourselves from far-reaching or lasting injury."

Hitler receives Rashid Ali al-Gaylani, the former Prime Minister of Iraq, during an official visit to the Wolfsschanze on July 15, 1942. (Polish National Archives)

In June 1941, Allied troops found Aleppo aerodrome littered with Axis and Vichy French aircraft – many of which had been damaged while on the ground by Allied air strikes. The original caption states that the larger aircraft in the background were used as transports during the German incursion into Iraq in May 1941. (Australian War Memorial; 099022)

THE ALLIES INVADE SYRIA

General Sir Archibald P Wavell, Commander-in-Chief, in the Middle East, called it the "Syrian Problem" – the fear that the French forces in the mandated territories of Syria and Lebanon would be occupied by the Germans. This concern prompted the Chiefs of Staff to urge Wavell to send a force into Syria.

In early May, the Germans had been allowed to use airfields in Syria for their aircraft transiting to Iraq to assist the revolt against the British-supported regime and there seemed little prospect of the Vichy French administration objecting to further German forces entering Syria. It was feared that if the Germans were allowed to establish a strong presence in Syria this would pose a threat to the Allies' control of the Suez Canal and their bases in Egypt. Equally, Cyprus would be at Hitler's mercy, while a German occupation of Syria would practically complete the encirclement of Turkey and make it difficult for the Turks to continue to resist Hitler's demands.

Wavell, whose vast Middle East Command stretched from the Mediterranean to British Somaliland, Aden, Iraq and the shores of the Persian Gulf, could ill-afford to reduce his commitment across the region to put together a field army capable of invading Syria. The French, who were certain to resist any attempted invasion, could count some 35,000 men in their ranks, along with possibly as many as 90 tanks and two artillery groups. In addition, the *Armée de l'air* had an initial strength of 90 aircraft which was later increased to 289.

Wavell was urged to make use of Free French troops, of which there were already two brigades in Palestine. But experience had already shown, during the abortive attack upon Dakar in September 1940, that when faced with Free French forces the Vichy troops fought with even more determination. Despite his reservations, Wavell realised that he had no choice; the only way he would be able to raise a large enough army to take Syria would be to include the Free French.

Wavell decided to risk the defence of Egypt in the Western Desert by taking the 7th Australian Division (less one brigade left to hold Tobruk) and move it to northern Palestine. At the same time, he sent the 5th Indian Infantry Brigade, which had just arrived from Sudan, to the northern frontier of Transjordan. The two Free French brigades of the 1st Free French Division joined the force under Henry Maitland Wilson, who was promoted to full general on May 31.

At the beginning of what was codenamed Operation *Exporter*, the British and Commonwealth force consisted of about 34,000 men, made up of 18,000 Australians, 9,000 British, 2,000 Indian and 5,000 Free French troops. The RAF and RAAF were able to contribute about 50 aircraft.

This comparatively weak and mixed force that Wavell pulled together hardly augured well for the attack upon Syria which began on June 8, 1941. The campaign lasted, as we shall see, until the middle of July.

British troops entering the ruins of the old Roman colonnade in Palmyra in Eastern Syria, on July 12, 1941, following the city's capture as part of Operation *Exporter*. (Historic Military Press)

Curtiss Tomahawk Mk.IIBs of 3 Squadron RAAF, lined up at Rayak, Lebanon, in June 1941. They were based at this former Vichy airfield for Operation *Exporter*. (Historic Military Press)

British artillery in action against the Afrika Korps. The original caption states that this image was taken during, "The British offensive in Libya", and that it shows "artillery shelling enemy positions in 1941". (Historic Military Press)

WAVELL'S BATTLEAXE OFFENSIVE

Driven by a need to try and relieve the hard-pressed garrison in Tobruk, General Wavell launched Operation *Battleaxe* on June 14, 1941.

"During 15th and 16th June," Wavell wrote, "the attack progressed fairly satisfactorily. The 22nd Guards Brigade occupied Capuzzo and Bir Waer taking several hundred prisoners and some guns, and the Cruiser tanks of the 7th Armoured Division inflicted considerable casualties on the enemy tanks. The enemy, however, still held out at Halfaya and Sollum; one squadron of Cruiser tanks had lost practically all its vehicles in an attack west of Capuzzo by running on to a concealed enemy anti-tank gun position; and we had suffered considerable casualties in… tanks from enemy minefields and some enemy high velocity guns at Halfaya.

"On the evening of 16th June, a strong force of enemy tanks attempted an outflanking movement to the south and was engaged by the 7th Armoured Brigade near Sidi Omar. Our Cruiser tanks inflicted casualties on the enemy but found themselves at the conclusion of the engagement heavily outnumbered and were compelled to withdraw."

Throughout the night of the 16th, and into the following day, Allied tank losses continued to mount. On the third day the Allies narrowly avoided outright disaster by withdrawing just ahead of a German encircling movement which would have cut them off from retreat. Wavell was forced to admit defeat late on the 17th and announced the failure of *Battleaxe*.

Inside Tobruk, the termination of the offensive marked a turning point in garrison life. From this moment on the defenders were forced to face the reality of a seemingly indefinite siege. The infantry found themselves undertaking stints in the Red Line every few weeks. "They moved from concrete bunkers and sandbag posts to caves, tunnels and camouflaged dug-outs," notes the Australian War Memorial. "Even when not fighting, those on duty still had much to do. The daily routine consisted of digging, wiring and laying mines, or fetching and carrying rolls of wire, sandbags and metal pickets, ammunition and water. The water was brackish and was always, always warm. 'The longing for something cool, or cold, is maddening,' wrote Lieutenant Tas Gill, 2/48th Battalion…

"The days were hot and dusty. Anywhere in Tobruk could be hit by enemy artillery or bombs. There was no escape from danger or stress, from the extreme temperatures or from the khamsin (dust storms) and insects. 'We just lived in holes in the ground, and it was filthy sand,' recalled Sergeant Max Thow, 2/12th Battalion. 'We had sand in our mouths, we had sand in our food, we had sand in our clothes.'"

Three days after *Battleaxe*'s termination, Churchill removed Wavell from his post and replaced him with General Sir Claude Auchinleck. The latter, aware of the situation he had inherited, was quick to praise Wavell for his leadership. Rommel, it transpired, also held his one-time opponent in high regard, keeping a copy of the British commander's book *Generals and Generalship* with him throughout the Desert War.

Groundcrew pictured with a Martin Maryland on a desert airstrip during the summer of 1941. (Historic Military Press)

HITLER INVADES THE SOVIET UNION

On the morning of Sunday, June 22, 1941, over four million Axis soldiers poured over the Russian border along a front 1,800 miles wide. In what was the largest invasion in the history of warfare, these troops were supported by 600,000 motor vehicles and 750,000 horses. Operation *Barbarossa*, named after the all-conquering Medieval Holy Roman Emperor Frederick I, was underway.

In the preceding days, the Soviet troops on the border had reported seeing pontoon bridges being built, of barbed-wire entanglements being cut through and an increase in German troop movements. But Stalin refused to countenance such reports, believing that Hitler would not break the Treaty of Non-Aggression between Germany and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics which had been formulated by Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs Molotov and German Foreign Minister Ribbentrop on August 23, 1939. This, it subsequently turned out, had been nothing more than a temporary expedient for Hitler to enable him to invade Poland without being opposed by the Russians.

Stalin hoped that this pact would stop Hitler attacking the Soviet Union, despite all the evidence to the contrary. Right up until the very last moment, the Russian leader maintained normal trading relations with Germany. The last train of raw materials for Germany crossed the border just hours before the invasion began. So, as the Wehrmacht finalised its preparations to invade, Stalin's men could do nothing other than watch.

It was only at 01.00 hours on the 22nd that the Red Army's military districts in the border areas received a signal hinting at what was about to happen. "Bring all forces to combat readiness," the message urged, only to then point out that they were to "avoid provocative actions of any kind". Just two hours later, Hitler made his move.

The Germans, in keeping with their principle of Blitzkrieg, struck suddenly and with overwhelming force. "Four a.m. on 22 June," one Red Army soldier recalled in a subsequent BBC broadcast, "hundreds of warplanes flew over us, going deep inside the country. Everyone at first thought it was some huge thunderstorm, so we ran out of our tent and saw an incredible number of 'planes overhead – and that's when we knew that it was war. The feeling is impossible to describe. It was sheer horror when the Germans started shelling us. Huge artillery explosions next to us; horses screaming; people screaming for help. The scene was just awful."

German troops passing a marker on the Russian border on Sunday, June 22, 1941. (via Historic Military Press)

Operation *Barbarossa* underway as German troops advance through a burning Russian village. (Everett Collection/Shutterstock)

Some of the troops who might well have faced the onslaught of Operation *Barbarossa*. The original caption, dated October 24, 1940, states: "An anti-tank gun squad goes into action "somewhere in Russia" during the recent tactical manoeuvres by Red Army units." (Historic Military Press)

Despite the fact that the front-line Soviet troops had been aware that something was afoot, many units were still thrown into a state of complete confusion. One Red Army officer, Lieutenant Rosenberg, watched as Germans bore down on his small force. "German tanks [were] approaching us with German soldiers running behind those tanks," he recalled. "We had to shoot back at them and retreat. They were dressed in full Nazi uniform firing machine-guns, and they were screaming at us, 'Surrender, you Russians'."

Within a few hours of the start of the invasion half of Rosenberg's unit had been killed or wounded. "By the evening of 22nd June," he continued, "we only had two artillery pieces left and we were retreating with them. I remember very vividly this one woman standing by the fence outside her house with her three children next to her. She was crying, and pleading, 'My dears, do not desert us!' This I will remember as long as I live."

The task that the Red Army faced that fateful morning was immense. A total of 148 German divisions – a staggering 80 per cent of Hitler's Heer – were committed to the enterprise. Hitler's forces were arranged in three Army Groups. Army Group North had been tasked to advance through the Baltic States of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia and seize the port city of Leningrad. For its part, Army Group South was to advance through the Ukraine towards Kiev and the Donbas industrial region. It was Army Group Centre that was handed the objectives of Minsk, Smolensk and, most importantly, Moscow itself. Hitler expected all these targets to be reached in roughly 10 weeks.

No less than 17 panzer divisions, with 3,400 tanks and formed into four panzer groups, formed the vanguard of *Barbarossa*. The panzer groups advanced with two motorised corps on the flanks and an infantry corps in the centre. The panzer units pushed deep into Soviet territory, while the infantry mopped up enemy units caught between the two panzer arms, except in the Baltic States which was too narrow a front.

Predictably, the assault on Stalin's forces in the early hours of the invasion also came from the air. In fact, throughout the first day of fighting on the new Eastern Front the Luftwaffe achieved spectacular success. No less than 60 Soviet airfields were bombed and almost 1,500 aircraft destroyed on the ground, with a further 300 Red Air Force aircraft shot down in combat. The Luftwaffe lost only 63 machines.

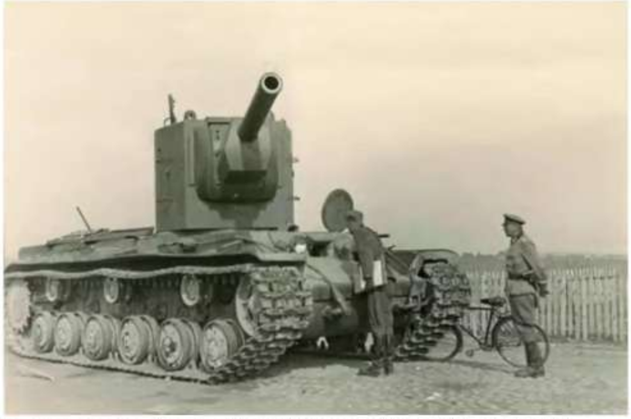
An hour after the offensive had begun, Joseph Goebbels, the Reich Minister of Propaganda, made a radio broadcast announcing the invasion of Russia to the German people. "At this moment," he declared, using Hitler's words, "a march is taking place that, for its extent, compares with the greatest the world has ever seen. I have decided today to place the fate and future of the Reich and our people in the hands of our soldiers."

Elements of the German 29th Infantry Division, also known as the Falke Division, crossing the Bug River during the advance on Kiev in 1941. Attached to the German 4th Army, the Falke Division also participated in a number of engagements against Soviet formations at Minsk, Smolensk and Bryansk during Operation *Barbarossa*. (Shutterstock/Everett Historical)

Later the same morning, the Führer proclaimed to a gathering of senior officers and Nazi officials that, "Before three months have passed, we shall witness a collapse of Russia, the like of which has never been seen in history".

The events of June 22 certainly suggested that both he and Goebbels had every right to be optimistic – but the fighting on the Eastern Front had yet to become the war of continual and devastating attrition with which it became synonymous.

Generaloberst Heinz Wilhelm Guderian, one of the architects of *Barbarossa*, on the Eastern Front in July 1941. (NARA)



German personnel inspect a captured Russian KV-2 heavy assault tank in 1941 – a design which impressed many of the invaders who encountered it during Operation *Barbarossa*. (Historic Military Press)

US TROOPS ARRIVE IN ICELAND

By the spring of 1941, the United Kingdom's military resources were under increasing pressure. Unsurprisingly, Churchill was keen to free up resources wherever possible – and one such opportunity was the Anglo-Canadian garrison in Iceland.

President Roosevelt had long assured his British counterpart that despite their neutrality, US forces would do what they could to safeguard the Atlantic shipping lanes, of which the protection of Iceland was part. US concerns for the island only increased further when Hitler's paratroopers landed so effectively on Crete on May 20.

Nine days later, Churchill informed Roosevelt that he would welcome the immediate relief of the British garrison. Within days, the American ambassador in London, John G Winant, travelled back to the United States to discuss the matter further. On June 4, the US Army's planners were told to prepare a plan for the immediate relief of the British forces. Two days later, the President confirmed his decision to send a United States force as soon as the Icelandic Government requested American protection, though it had been quickly realised that the task should be handed to the US Marine Corps.

Initially reluctant to accept an American garrison, the Icelandic acquiescence to the plans was indicated in a statement by the island's Prime Minister, made on July 1, that the presence of US troops was "in accordance with the interest of Iceland". Roosevelt immediately ordered the initial USMC contingent to set out; the convoy carrying it sailed from Argentia, Newfoundland, before dawn the next morning. It was the first American task force to put to sea in World War Two.

A relieved Churchill sent the following message to Roosevelt: "I am much encouraged by your Marines taking over that cold place and I hope that once the first instalment has arrived you will give full publicity to it. It would give us hope to face the long haul that lies ahead."

On July 7, Roosevelt officially announced that the US ships had anchored off Reykjavík. He pointed out that the Americans were there "to supplement, and eventually to replace, the British forces," and that an adequate defence of the strategic island was necessary to ward off a potential threat to the Western Hemisphere.

The Marines themselves began disembarking the next morning. It marked the start of a process that was not completed until July 12. Like Churchill, the British garrison welcomed the new arrivals, as Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth J Clifford IJSMCR once noted: "Even before the first brigade unit set foot on shore, the Marines learned what the term 'mutual cooperation' meant to the British. They could not have been more cordial, generous, and helpful. As the brigade was woefully short of motor transport, the British put more than 50 trucks at its disposal, together with drivers familiar with the region and the traffic problems peculiar to Iceland… They also furnished rations and turned over several of their permanent camps to the new arrivals, moving into tent camps to make room."

As the US garrison arrives in Iceland on July 8, 1941, US Marine Private Robert C Fowler is warmly welcomed by Gunner Harold Ricardi of the Royal Artillery. (USNHHC)

Part of the US Navy Task Force that sailed to Iceland is pictured steaming out of Reykjavik harbour at the time of USMC garrison's arrival in July 1941. Seen from the battleship USS *New York* are, just astern, USS *Arkansas* and the light cruisers USS *Brooklyn* and USS *Nashville*. (USNHHC)

Russia burns in the summer of 1941. Taken by a German soldier, this image depicts buildings burning in a Russian village during the fighting in the Smolensk area prior to the city's capture. (Historic Military Press)

THE BATTLE OF SMOLENSK

Since Hitler had unleashed Operation *Barbarossa*, Generalfeldmarschall von Bock's Army Group Centre had advanced 310 miles. By June 28, Generaloberst Heinz Guderian's 2nd Panzer Group and General Hoth's 3rd Panzer Group 3 had encircled three Russian armies and captured over 320,000 men in the Bialystok-Minsk pockets.

Pushing on, and following the approximate route taken by Napoleon a century earlier, though on a far broader front, these formations soon found themselves ready to mount an assault on the city of Smolensk. Lying on the banks of the Dnieper River, its capture would allow the Germans to continue their advance towards Moscow, some 200 miles to the north-east. Von Bock's plan was for the 2nd Panzer Group to cross the Dnieper, closing on Smolensk from the south, while the 3rd Panzer Group was to encircle the city from the north.

The operation began on July 10, with Guderian's 2nd Panzer Group attacking over the Dnieper. Taken by surprise, the Soviet 13th Army was overrun and in just three days Guderian had closed to within 12 miles of Smolensk. At the same time, the 3rd Panzer Group had swept across the River Dvina, pushing aside the Soviet 19th Army and 20th armies.

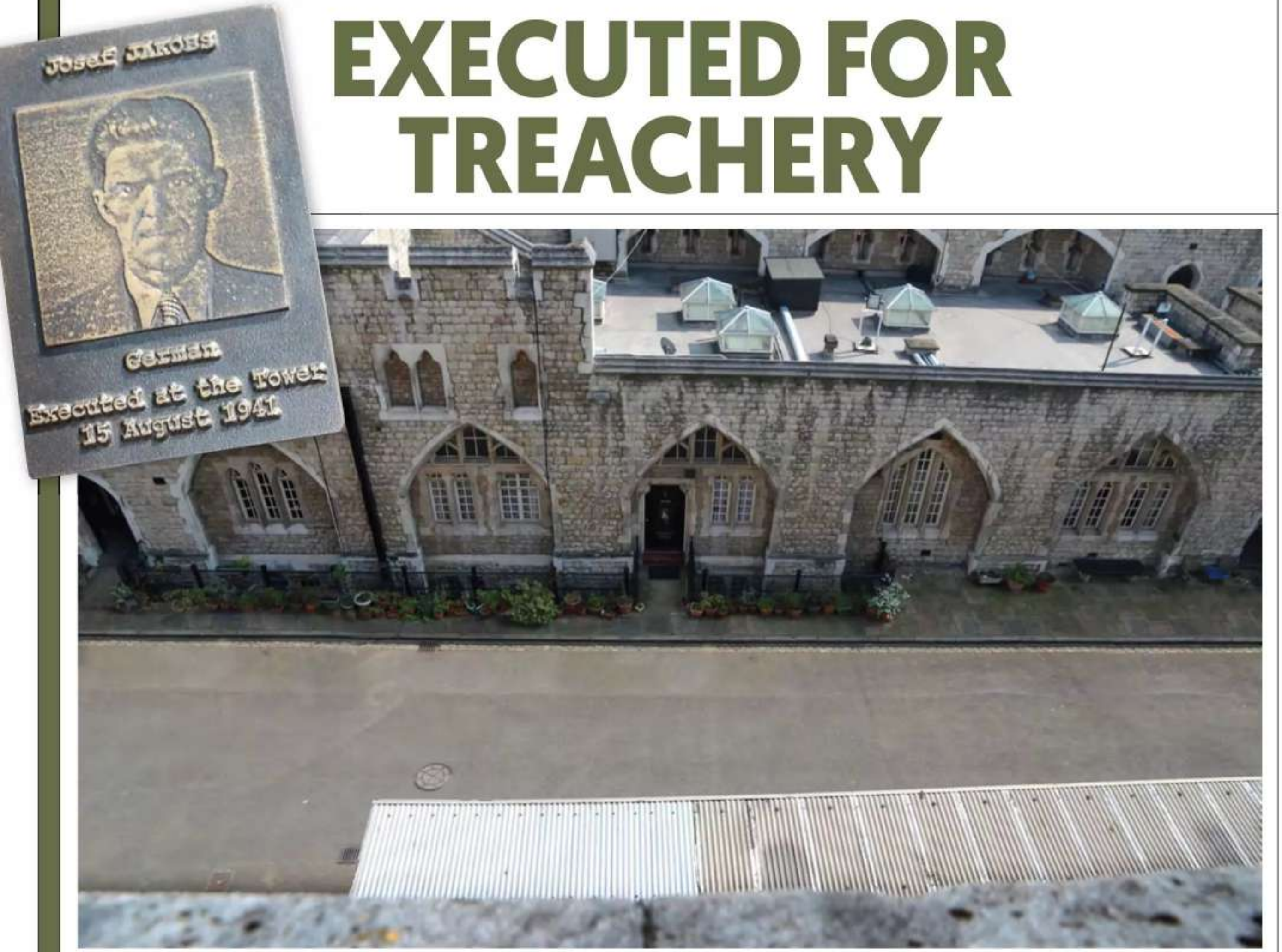
On the 15th, the 29th Motorized Division, supported by the 17th Panzer Division, broke into Smolensk itself. However, any hopes of a swift victory were quickly dispelled as the Germans became bogged down in bitter house-to-house fighting with the Soviet 16th Army.

As the Germans took Smolensk street-by-street, both sides engaged in a propaganda war. Hitler's forces repeatedly claimed that the city had fallen; in reply, the Russians stated that, at best, the enemy had little more than a foothold in Smolensk. On July 24, one editorial, in the *Dundee Courier*, posed the question, "What is the truth about Smolensk?" The paper went on to add: "On Wednesday of last week [the 16th] the Germans in their official war report asserted that the town, halfway between the Polish border and Moscow, was in their hands. They have gone on repeating the claim ever since. No admission of the loss appeared in the Russian reports, which have continued to tell of heavy fighting in and around places well to the west of Smolensk. To-day Reuter's correspondent in Moscow tells us on authority which satisfies him that Smolensk is still held by the Russians, who admit that a German mechanised division or divisions at one stage reached the outskirts, but assert that it was driven back."

However stubborn the Soviet defence, by July 27 the Germans had linked up to the east of Smolensk. Some 250,000 to 300,000 Red Army personnel had been swept up into captivity. Though a terrible defeat, it was the first time the Soviets had tried to implement a coordinated counterattack against a large part of the front. The Germans, for their part, were taken aback at the stiffening resistance Stalin's men had displayed. The Blitzkrieg's timetable had also been affected – and the Battle for Moscow was still to come.

Debris in Smolensk after the city's capture in July 1941. The original caption states that this is "war debris in the Russian city of Smolensk, scene of bitter fighting between the armies of Hitler and Stalin". (Historic Military Press)

EXECUTED FOR TREACHERY



Looking down on the site where the rifle range at the Tower of London once stood – roughly where the bicycle rack at the bottom of the image is. It was in this structure that Josef Jakobs was executed on August 15, 1941. (Courtesy of Robert Mitchell)

The chair on which Jakobs sat during his execution. It can still be seen today in the Tower of London. (Courtesy of Robert Mitchell)

Given Royal Assent on May 23, 1940, the Treachery Act of that year was intended to facilitate the prosecution of enemy spies for the duration of the "war emergency". The first section of the Act stated that, "If, with intent to help the enemy, any person does, or attempts or conspires with any other person to do, any act which is designed or likely to give assistance to the naval, military or air operations of the enemy, to impede such operations of His Majesty's forces, or to endanger life, he shall be guilty of felony and shall on conviction suffer death."

The first execution under this Act took place on July 10, 1941, when George Johnson Armstrong was hanged at Wandsworth jail. A ship's engineer, Armstrong was arrested on his return to Britain from America. While in the US he met the German consul at Boston, Massachusetts, and offered his services as a spy for the enemy. His trial at the Old Bailey concluded on May 8, 1941, when, found guilty, he was sentenced to death. After Armstrong's appeal, held on June 23, failed, he was executed by Thomas Pierrepoint on July 10. Armstrong was one of only three British subjects who were sentenced to death and executed under the Treachery Act 1940.

By the end of the war, 17 individuals had been found guilty under the Treachery Act and sentenced to death. One of these individuals subsequently had their sentence commuted to life imprisonment. Of the other 16, four others were executed in 1941. In the case of two of these men, Werner Waelti (a Swiss national) and Karl Richard Richter (a German), they were both executed at Wandsworth on the same day – August 6, 1941.

The next execution was that of Josef Jakobs on August 15. Jakobs had been charged with, "Committing treachery in that you at Ramsay in Huntingdonshire on the night of 31 January 1941/1 February 1941 descended by parachute with intent to help the enemy." Having broken his ankle whilst exiting the aircraft, Jakobs was captured on landing having fired his pistol into the air to summon help. His descent had also been witnessed by members of the local Home Guard who rushed to the landing point. He was arrested still wearing his flying suit and carrying British currency, forged papers and a radio.

Jakobs was found guilty and sentenced to death by firing squad; this was the only occasion in which this method was used under the Act. As the historian Stephen Stafford noted, "Ten days later, Jakobs was taken to the old miniature .22 rifle range in the Tower [of London]'s grounds, where the First World War spies had been shot, and placed in a brown Windsor chair (due to his damaged right leg) and a white lint target was then pinned on his chest over his heart. At 7.12am on 15 August 1941, an eight-man firing squad composed from members of The Holding Battalion, Scots Guards, shot Joseph Jakobs."

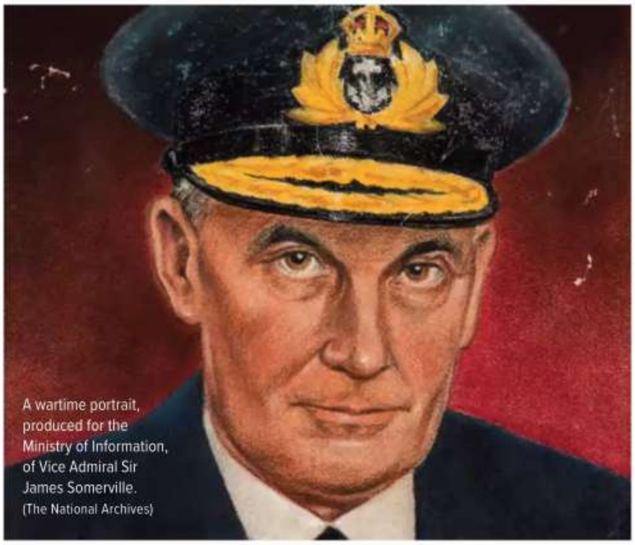
A 'WINSTON SPECIAL' PUTS TO SEA

The island of Malta had been holding out for months against the attacks of the Regia Aeronautica, Fliegerkorps X having been withdrawn in May 1941 in preparation for operations against the Soviet Union. But it had become apparent that Italian attacks against Allied shipping had decreased as the Italians' stock of torpedoes at their Sardinian airfields was nearly exhausted – a window of opportunity through which a convoy could be sent to Malta.

Under the codename Operation *Substance*, convoy GM1, a collection of six fast merchant ships, *City of Pretoria*, *Deucalion*, *Durham*, *Port Chalmers*, *Melbourne Star* and *Sydney Star*, which had begun to gather on July 11, finally sailed from the UK two days later as part of Convoy WS9C, reaching Gibraltar a week later – the WS in the designation is said to stand for 'Winston Specials', denoting a convoy that had been explicitly ordered by the Prime Minister.

At Gibraltar, GM1 was joined by warships from Force H to escort it through the Mediterranean. This escort consisted of the battlecruiser *Renown*, the battleship *Nelson*, the aircraft-carrier *Ark Royal*, five cruisers, and 17 destroyers, with Vice Admiral Sir James Somerville in command.

The convoy was spotted on July 22, by an Italian submarine and the following day the Italians attacked. At 10.55 hours on the 23rd nine dive bombers and five high-level bombers attacked the convoy. The destroyer HMS *Fearless* was hit by a torpedo and was severely damaged, with one officer and 24 ratings being killed. *Fearless* was unable to continue. She was abandoned by her crew and sunk by destroyer HMS *Forester*. Fleet Air Arm Fulmar fighters from *Ark Royal* were scrambled but they were unable to prevent the Italian bombers from releasing their bombs, one of which exploded very close to another destroyer, *Firedrake*, causing such damage that she had to be towed back to Gibraltar.


A wartime portrait, produced for the Ministry of Information, of Vice Admiral Sir James Somerville. (The National Archives)

The Regia Aeronautica did not return that day, but during the night the Italian navy made its move with torpedo-armed motorboats (Motoscafo armato silurante, or MAS). At 02.50 hours on July 24, *Sydney Star* was hit by a torpedo on the port side and began to list. It was decided to transfer the 460 troops she was carrying to the destroyer HMS *Nester* for safety. Despite a gaping hole caused by the torpedo the *Sydney Star* managed to limp to her destination, with her cargo intact. In fact, by the end of the 24th, all the merchant ships of Operation *Substance* had arrived at Malta to deliver their valuable cargoes.

Besieged as it was, Malta continued to receive the attention of the Italian armed forces. As soon as they had docked, the ships of GM1 were spotted by an Italian reconnaissance seaplane, which was escorted by no less than 42 Macchi C.200 fighters. Defending RAF Hurricanes were scrambled and shot down three of the escorts without loss. An audacious attack on Grand Harbour by other MAS boats and manned torpedoes resulted on the night of July 25-26 was thwarted by Allied codebreakers.

Overlooking Valletta Harbour, the Siege Bell Memorial commemorates those who lost their lives in the vital convoys between 1940 and 1943, including Operation *Substamce*. (Alizada Studios/Shutterstock)

ANGLO-SOVIET AGREEMENT SIGNED

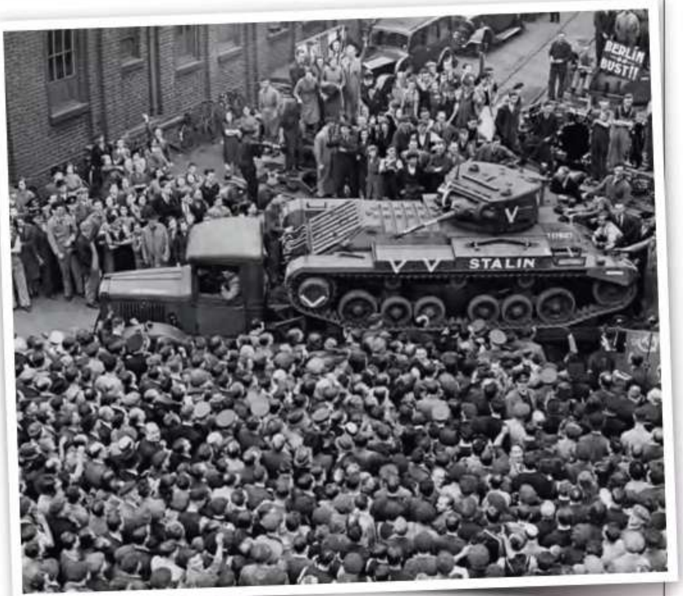
The War in the East was barely four weeks old when the first Anglo-Soviet protocol was signed on July 12, in this case in Moscow by the British Ambassador, Sir Stafford Cripps, and Vyacheslav Molotov, Stalin's Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Though it was reasonably brief in its content, the agreement contained two main clauses. The first was that the two governments undertook to render each other assistance and support of all kinds in the war against the Third Reich; the second was that neither would make peace with Hitler except by mutual agreement.

Following its signing, the Anglo-Soviet Agreement led to an immediate flow of war materiel to the Soviet Union. Speaking in the House of Commons on September 9, 1941, the Minister of Economic Warfare, Hugh Dalton, confirmed the progress so far regarding aid to Russia: "I am glad to say that considerable progress has been made in providing our Russian Allies with economic assistance. As I informed the House on 5th August, the Soviet Government furnished us with a list of their requirements. Most of the commodities on that list can be obtained from Allied sources, and substantial shipments have already taken place, including supplies of rubber, tin, wool, lead, jute and shellac. The House will appreciate that there are difficulties of transport, but we are doing our best to meet the Russian requests in full."

One of the earliest appeals for support for Britain's newest ally came in the form of the "Tanks for Russia" Week, which commenced on September 22, 1941. Speaking the day before, Mr Chuter Ede, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Education, said: "It is not enough merely to sit back and give loud applause any time Russia is mentioned. Stalin will value one tank far higher than he will a theatre full of cheers."

To mark the event, on the 22nd the Russian Ambassador, Mr Ivan Maisky, accompanied by members of the Soviet Military Mission to the United Kingdom, visited the Birmingham Railway Carriage & Wagon Co. factory in Smethwick. His task that day was to formally receive the first of the British tanks that were to be sent to Russia. During the ceremony, Maisky said: "These great machines will not rust in idleness. Immediately they arrive in my country they will go into the battle line against the Nazis, and contribute to our common victory."

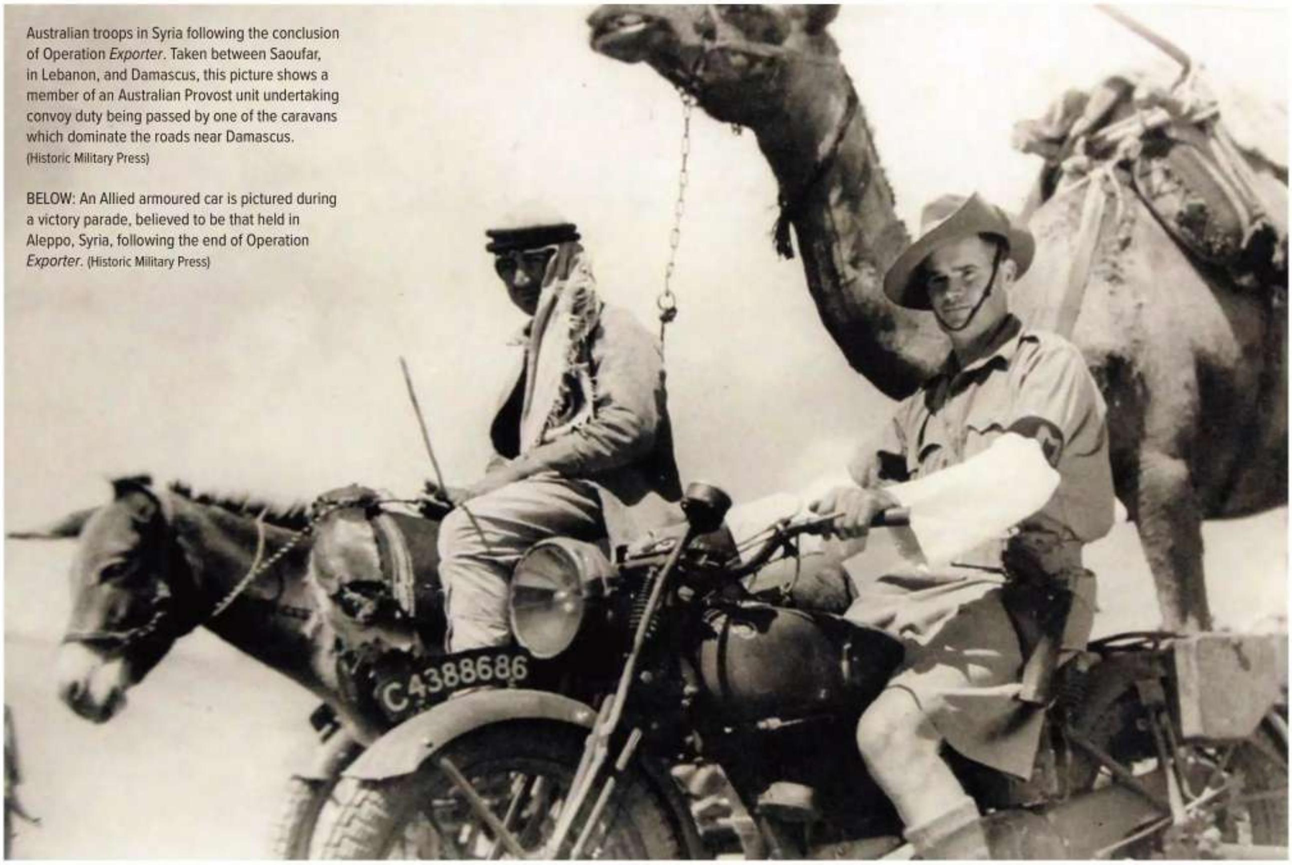


One of the tanks presented to Ambassador Maisky during the ceremony at the Birmingham Railway Carriage & Wagon Co. works. A factory fresh Valentine Mk.II with the War Department number T17527, *Stalin*, as it was nicknamed, has been decorated with "V" for Victory symbols for the occasion. (Historic Military Press)

It would seem that Ambassador Maisky was true to his word. According to the historian Alexander Hill, the diaries of N I Biriukov, a Red Army officer responsible from August 1941 onwards for the distribution of recently acquired tanks to the front lines, the first 20 British tanks arrived at the Soviet tank training school in Kazan on October 28, 1941, at which point a further 120 tanks were being unloaded at Archangel. By December 9, 1941, the British Military Mission to Moscow noted that about 90 British tanks were already in action with Soviet forces.

STRENGTHEN GOVERNMENT

A huge crowd has gathered outside the British Museum to hear Harry Pollitt, the General Secretary of the Communist Party of Great Britain, make a speech about providing aid to Russia, 1941. (via Historic Military Press)



Australian troops in Syria following the conclusion of Operation *Exporter*. Taken between Saoufar, in Lebanon, and Damascus, this picture shows a member of an Australian Provost unit undertaking convoy duty being passed by one of the caravans which dominate the roads near Damascus. (Historic Military Press)

BELOW: An Allied armoured car is pictured during a victory parade, believed to be that held in Aleppo, Syria, following the end of Operation *Exporter*. (Historic Military Press)

VICTORY IN SYRIA

General Wilson launched his attack upon Syria on June 8, with attacks across the Syrian border from Palestine and amphibious landings on the Mediterranean coast by commandos from 'C' Battalion, Special Service Brigade. Wilson had planned a four-pronged invasion. On the right the Free French advanced to within about ten miles of Damascus, reaching there by June 12. On the left, the Australian right column advanced upon Beirut, while, on June 9, the left column had crossed the River Litani on the coast after an extremely hard fight. The initial aerial advantage of the French was lost when most of their aircraft were destroyed on the ground.

The Vichy French had expected to be attacked by much larger numbers and when they saw the weakness of the invading forces – and the inclusion of the Free French – their morale was boosted, and they put up the stiff resistance which Wavell had feared. As a result, they launched numerous counter-attacks, which held up the Allied advance.

During the campaign there were nine significant battles, fighting which led to the awarding of two Victoria Crosses. The nature of the ground was ideally suited for defence and, in Wavell's own words: "The feeling between the Vichy French and Free French was extremely bitter, and the French professional soldiers were also undoubtedly fighting with a view to preserving their professional honour."

Despite Vichy French counter-attacks, Damascus, the Syrian capital, was taken by British and Commonwealth troops on June 21 after three days of fighting. The following day, the town of Marjayoun in Lebanon fell to Australian and Indian troops. It was through his actions at Marjayoun and later at Damour on July 6, that Lieutenant Arthur Cutler was awarded the second Victoria Cross of the campaign, but the first and only such award granted to an Australian artilleryman.

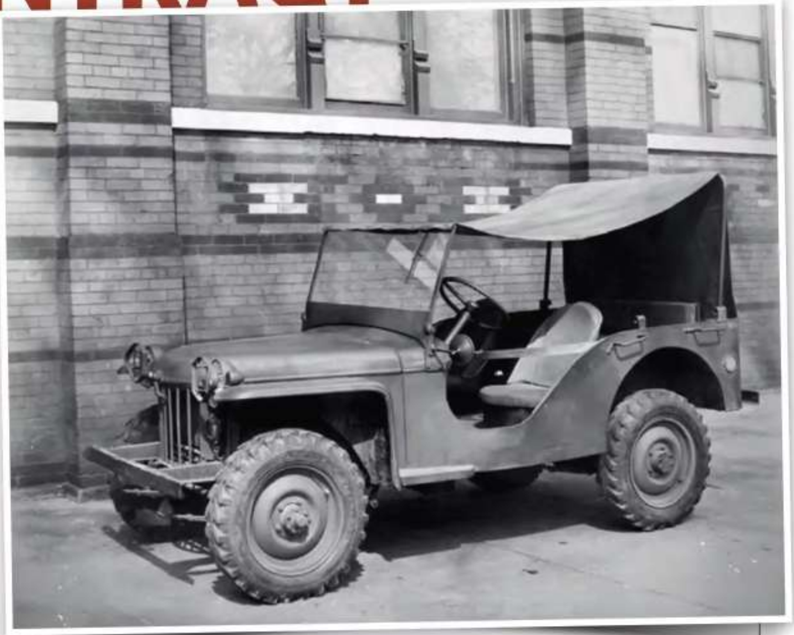
There were also minor actions at sea between the Royal Navy and French vessels with the German air force also attacking British warships off the Syrian coast.

It was on July 12, 1941, that Operation *Exporter* came to an end with the surrender of the last Vichy French troops in Syria. The armistice between Vichy and British/Free French forces was signed two days later at Acre in the light of a motorcycle headlight.

Under the terms of the armistice, all Vichy materiel and equipment was to be handed over to the British and Commonwealth forces. The Vichy French were given the choice of joining the Free French or returning to France; most opted for the latter. During the campaign, the Vichy French suffered 3,350 killed or wounded, while the British and Free French lost about 2,400 men.

As well as securing the British positions in the Middle East, the occupation of Syria allowed Commonwealth forces to take over naval and air bases far north of Suez and increased the safety of the oil route from Basra to Baghdad in Iraq to Haifa in Palestine.

FIRST JEEP PRODUCTION CONTRACT



A precursor of the famous Jeep, in effect a Jeep prototype, this is an example of the Bantam Reconnaissance Car Mk.II. This one is serial number 1007, the seventh of 62 built. (NARA)

General Dwight D Eisenhower once stated that, "The Jeep, the Dakota, and the Landing Craft were the three tools that won the war". The first of this trio had its origins in decisions made by the US government prior to America's entry into World War Two.

On July 11, 1940, the US Army approached 135 American automotive manufacturers, soliciting bids for a new ¼-ton "light reconnaissance vehicle" that would replace its existing, aging stock of light motor vehicles. In keeping with the ethos of the project, the manufacturers had just 11 days in which to submit their proposals. Perhaps it was for this very reason that only three organisations responded – the American Bantam Car Company, Willys-Overland Motors, and the Ford Motor Company.

The demands placed on interested parties were far from insignificant. As well as prompt submission of bids, the US Army had stipulated that a working prototype would have to be delivered in just 49 days, while 70 test vehicles were to be ready to go in 75 days. Because it submitted a set of blueprints, costings, and weight estimates, as well as supplier specifications, on time, it was Bantam that was initially selected to take the project forward. Bantam's first prototype was duly delivered to the US Army's test centre at Camp Holabird, Maryland, on September 23, 1940.

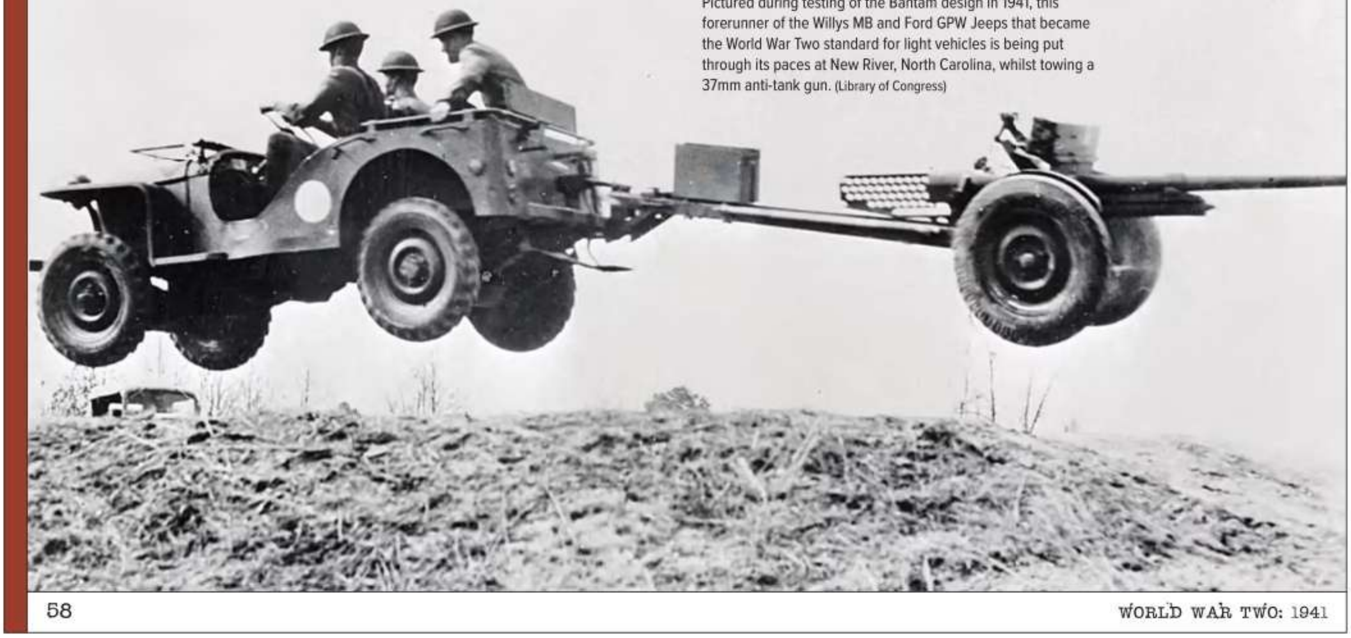
As work on the Bantam design continued, it was becoming increasingly apparent that the company would not have the capacity to produce the final vehicle in the quantity required by the US government. At the same time, despite having given Bantam the go-ahead, the Army had invited both Willys and Ford to continue their own development work, even allowing both companies to inspect the design that Bantam had produced.

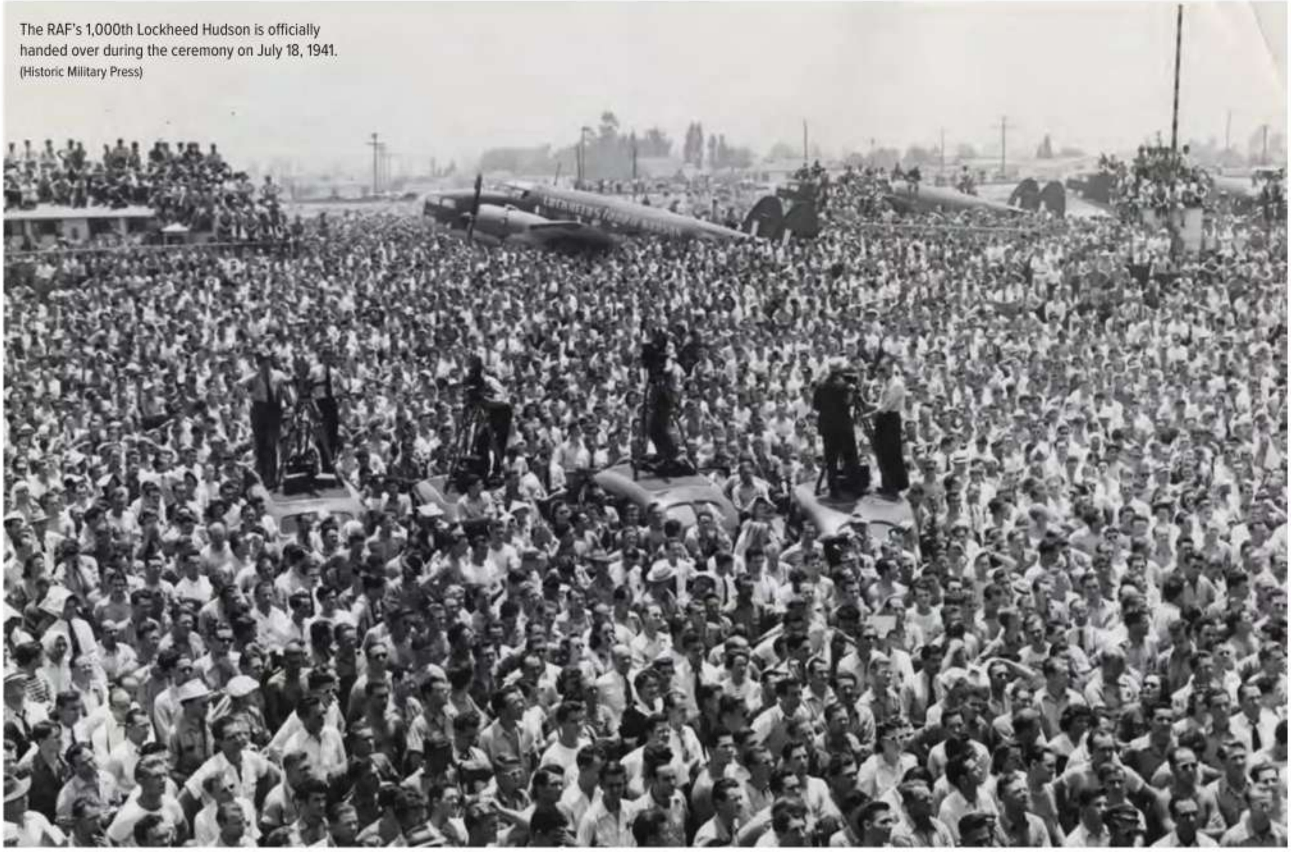
By the end of November 1940, all three companies presented the most recent version of their light reconnaissance vehicles – all of which were remarkably similar, and not just in appearance. Each one was duly rewarded with an order for 1,500 units. But by this stage, chiefly because it had the most powerful engine, it was Willys that was emerging as the preferred manufacturer.

After arduous testing, it was Willys-Overland, of Toledo, Ohio, that was finally awarded the first mass-production contract on July 16, 1941. The US Army's order demanded a production run of 16,000 vehicles, each to be constructed at a unit price of $738.74.

On August 1, 1941, the American nationwide Sunday newspaper *Parade* devoted three full pages to a feature detailing the US Army's new vehicle, the "Truck, 1/4-ton, 4x4". The reporter went on to describe the vehicle as "the Army's most intriguing new gadget", adding that it was a "tiny truck which can do practically everything". What came to be known as the Jeep – though no one can be certain exactly why this name was chosen – was perhaps the most iconic vehicles of World War Two. By August 1945, some 363,000 examples had been manufactured by Willys and 280,000 by Ford.

Pictured during testing of the Bantam design in 1941, this forerunner of the Willys MB and Ford GPW Jeeps that became the World War Two standard for light vehicles is being put through its paces at New River, North Carolina, whilst towing a 37mm anti-tank gun. (Library of Congress)





The RAF's 1,000th Lockheed Hudson is officially handed over during the ceremony on July 18, 1941. (Historic Military Press)

LEND-LEASE MILESTONE

Having initially been proposed by President Franklin D Roosevelt on December 17, 1940, the Lend-Lease Act, which was subtitled "An Act to Promote the Defense of the United States", passed through its final vote in the US Senate on March 11, 1941. Three days later it was signed into law by the President.

The effects of Lend-Lease quickly touched virtually every aspect of the United Kingdom's war effort – including the acquisition of US-manufactured aircraft. In time, the RAF received just over 2,000 Lockheed Hudsons. Of this total, 800 were commercial purchases, the remainder being supplied under Lend-Lease contracts. It was the RAF's 1,000th Hudson which was the centre of attention on July 18, 1941. On that Friday, with the aircraft having just rolled off the production lines, Viscount Halifax, the British Ambassador to the United States, travelled to the Lockheed factory at Burbank California to officially accept it.

In an impressive ceremony, the Hudson was inspected by Lord and Lady Halifax. A reporter for *Time* magazine noted that "thirty thousand U.S. workmen, employed by the big Lockheed airplane factory at Burbank, Calif., waited in the field beside the plant. In white shirts, bareheaded in the California noonday sun, they watched with the intent, quizzical, unfathomable expressions of U.S. workmen in a crowd. On the platform, Lord Halifax finished his brief speech of thanks to the men for the production of planes for Britain."

The workers' response was described as "ear-splitting and prolonged". There was the same reaction when Lockheed's president, Robert E Gross, informed those present that Hudson No.1266 was already on the assembly line. In a prepared address broadcast by the American MBS Network, Lord Halifax also passed on the personal thanks of an RAF pilot who had recently flown a Hudson on a sortie over Occupied France. Telling the story, which was recounted in the *Cumberland Evening Times* (published in Maryland), the Ambassador told the crowd: "'Hell,' the pilot said to me, 'it [the Hudson] was shot to pieces. Pretty nearly everything was shot to pieces. Look at the rudder, not much left of it, but the old kite brought us home 350 miles on one lung. Not another aircraft in the world could take the punishment this one did today and yet make its landfall. If you ever get to California, drop into the Lockheed factory and tell them thanks for me."

With the speeches over, one of Lockheed's test pilots, James Mattern, took off in the 1,000th Hudson. After circling the airfield twice in salute, he then flew off to the east.

Not everyone, however, welcomed the British Ambassador's presence. During his visit, both at the factory site and afterwards at Los Angeles City Hall, he was "picketed" by women who represented organisations opposed to a US entry into the war. Amongst the various banners they carried was one which carried the slogan "Bundle Back to Britain Halifax, FDR may want you, we don't!".

An American-built Lockheed Hudson is unloaded on to the quayside at a British port having safely crossed the Atlantic. (Library of Congress)

THE FIRST ARCTIC CONVOY

With it agreed that the United Kingdom would support the Soviet Union in its fight against the Third Reich, the discussion then focused on how best to get the seaborne supplies to Russia. Of the routes that could be used, Churchill outlined the problems when speaking of the general war situation on September 9, 1941: "Only three routes are open: the Arctic route by Archangel, which may be hampered by the winter ice; the Far Eastern route via Vladivostok, which is scowled upon by the Japanese and operates over only 7,000 miles of railway line; and, finally, the route across Persia, which leads over a 500-mile stretch from the Persian Gulf to that great inland sea, the Caspian, upon which the Russians maintain a strong naval force and which again gives access to the very heart of Russia, the Volga Basin."

Despite the reservations of the First Sea Lord, Admiral Dudley Pound, it was the northern Archangel route that was selected for the first Russia-bound convoy. Aware that this route presented the greatest opportunities to the Germans, Pound declared that its use ensured that "the dice [were] loaded against us in every direction".

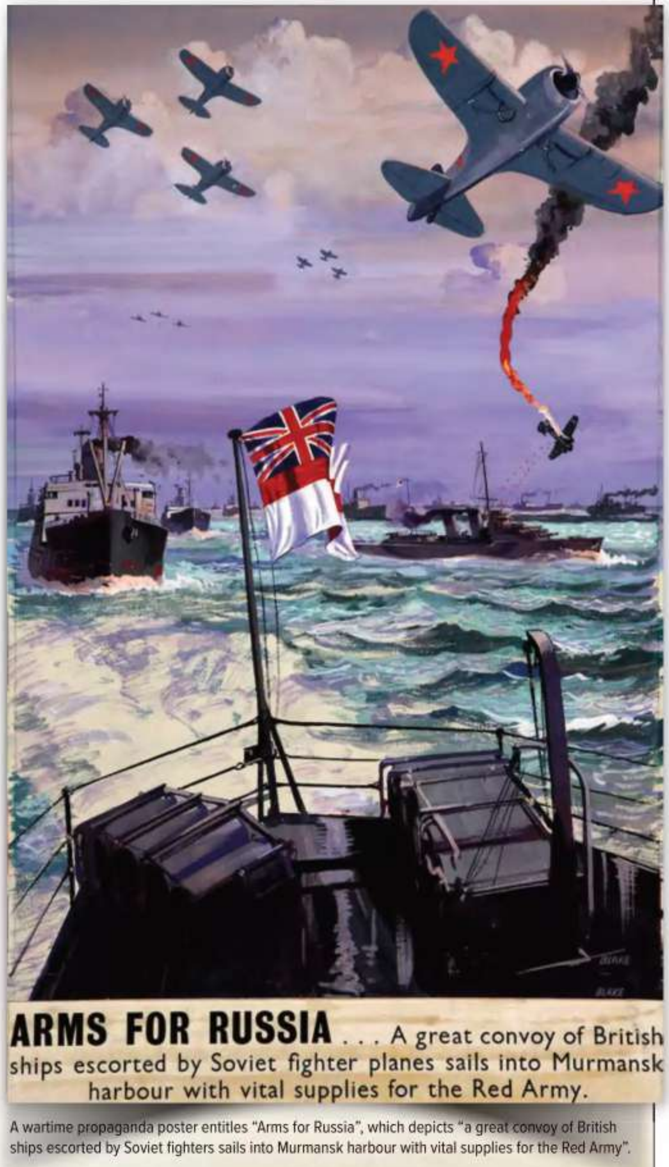
Political expediency won over, and by August 12, the merchant ships that would form the convoy, five British and one Dutch, had congregated at Liverpool. They were supported by the Royal Fleet Auxiliary oiler *Aldersdale*. The Convoy Commodore, Captain John Dowding RNR, raised his flag on the venerable *Llanstephan Castle*. The cargo being carried on the ships included quantities of wool, rubber and tin, as well as 24 crated Hawker Hurricanes.

This small convoy departed from Liverpool the same day, initially bound for Hvalfjord in Iceland. The latter was reached on August 16. After a few days during which final preparations were completed, the convoy set out on its final leg to Russia on August 21. It arrived in Archangel ten days later having completed the voyage without attracting the attention of the Germans.

One of the merchant seamen on the convoy, speaking at its 75th anniversary in 2016, recalled that, "Archangel was like something we had never seen before, everything was made of logs, houses, halls and stores were all built of logs, all the roads were made of logs, and you could not smoke in the street. They were little log buildings scattered about and to smoke you had to go into one of these, they held ten people, so we would sit and smoke with the locals."

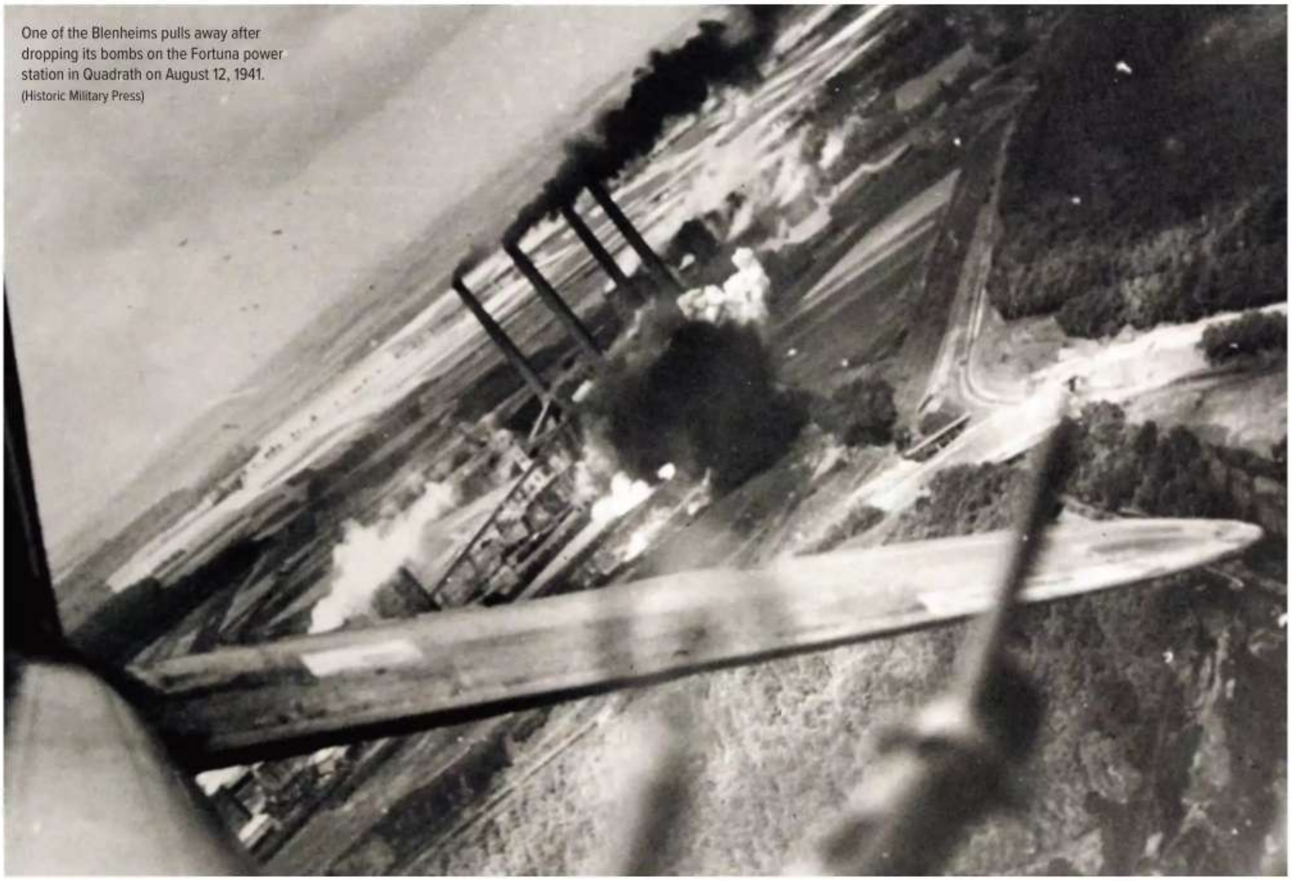
The first homeward-bound convoy, QP 1, which included the returning *Dervish* merchant ships, left Archangel on September 28, 1941. QP 1 arrived at Scapa Flow on October 9. Once again, this convoy completed the journey unscathed.

Between August 1941 and May 1945, there was a total of 78 Arctic convoys. Of the ships that sailed on them, 5.7 per cent were lost compared with the overall convoy losses during the war of 0.33 per cent.


ARMS FOR RUSSIA . . . A great convoy of British ships escorted by Soviet fighter planes sails into Murmansk harbour with vital supplies for the Red Army.

A wartime propaganda poster entitles "Arms for Russia", which depicts "a great convoy of British ships escorted by Soviet fighters sails into Murmansk harbour with vital supplies for the Red Army".

Among the naval vessels that provided the escort for Operation *Dervish* was the E-class destroyer HMS *Electra* – seen here. She was deployed as the Senior Officer's ship of the escort for the convoy. (Historic Military Press)



One of the Blenheims pulls away after dropping its bombs on the Fortuna power station in Quadrath on August 12, 1941. (Historic Military Press)

COLOGNE POWER STATIONS ATTACKED

As well as materiel aid being despatched by sea, the British government ordered that, where possible, military action should also be used to support the Soviets. One result of this policy was a "special daylight raid" against the vital power stations at Knapsack and Quadrath near Cologne. The intention was to try and draw Luftwaffe fighters away from the Eastern Front.

A total of 54 Blenheims formed the main force despatched on August 12, 1941. They were drawn from Nos. 18, 21, 82, 107, 114, 139 and 226 squadrons. They were supported by other bombers tasked with carrying out diversionary attacks. The Blenheims, each loaded with a pair of 500lb bombs, made low-level approaches at high speed, with the majority reporting reaching the targets and carrying out accurate bombing.

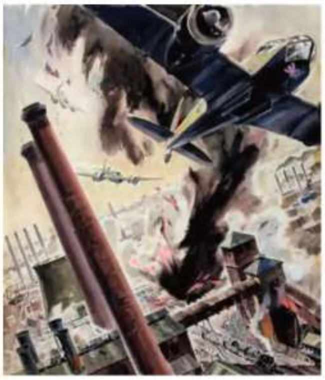
One unidentified Canadian pilot subsequently gave the following description of his crew's attack on the Goldenburg plant at Knapsack: "Over Germany we flew below the level of the trees. My observer called me up when we were seven minutes from the target, and at that moment another squadron of Blenheims crossed our paths. They were on their way to the other power-station. The air seemed alive with British bombers.

"We were nearly there when my rear gunner cried, 'Tallyho, fighter to port'. I felt the aircraft jar twice and saw cannon shells hitting the port wing. I told my flight [the last to attack Knapsack] to take evasive action. Then the flak became intense. I could see it bursting among bombers in front of me and I looked on the ground to see where it came from. I saw flashes from a gun emplacement and went straight for it. We passed about three feet over the gun, and I saw soldiers in a trench hit by a stream of bullets. The gun ceased fire.

"You couldn't miss the target. There were the twelve chimneys – a row of four and a parallel row of eight – standing dark against the sky. The sun was to our port bow. There was smoke and flames coming from the plant, so we climbed to attack. The flames were 50 feet high and the smoke too thick to let us bomb accurately from any lower.

"Inside the buildings we could see the sudden red glow of explosions under the smoke. I flew straight between the chimneys. I was watching my observer's elbow as he pulled back the release lever, and then I heard him call 'Bombs gone'. I did a steep turn over a belt of trees down into a sandstone quarry to get away from the flak. I should think we went about thirty feet below the level of the ground."

As he hastily withdrew from the target, this pilot's Blenheim was damaged, both through gunfire, but also when he clipped a tree. Though he eventually made it back to base, ten of the attackers were lost through fighter attack or anti-aircraft fire.



A stylised depiction of some of 2 Group's Blenheims passing over the Knapsack target on August 12, 1941. This painting was used as the basis of at least one wartime propaganda poster. (via Historic Military Press)

THE ATLANTIC CHARTER

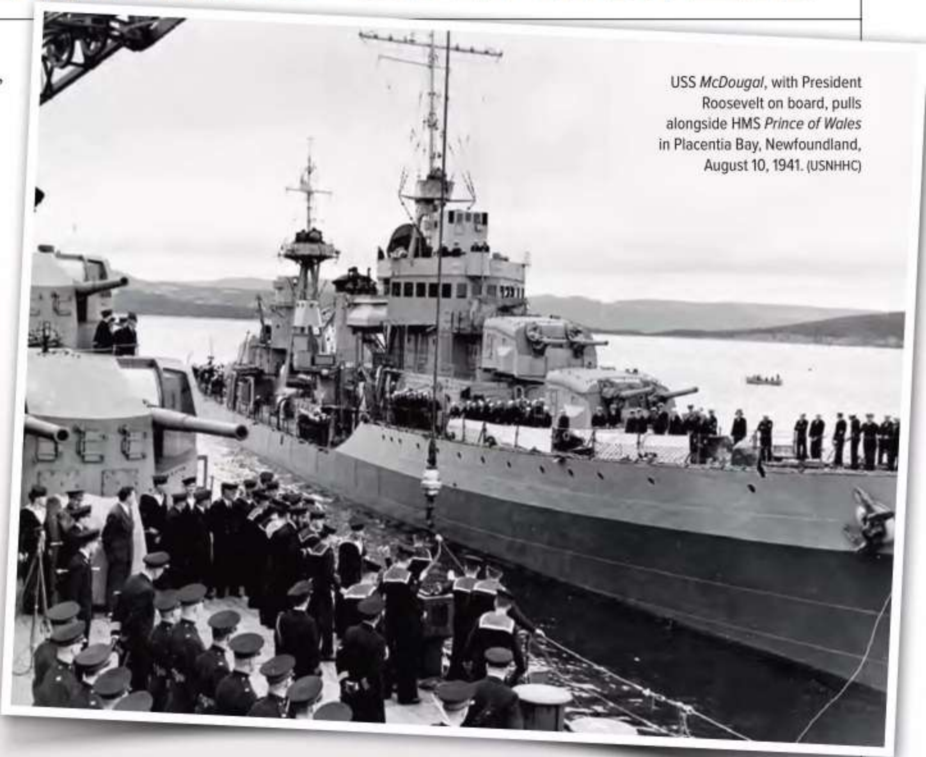
On August 4, 1941, Winston Churchill boarded the battleship HMS *Prince of Wales*, then anchored at Scapa Flow. The Prime Minister was accompanied by an illustrious party of war leaders that included the First Sea Lord, Admiral of the Fleet Dudley Pound, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Field Marshal John Dill, the Vice Chief of Air Staff, Air Marshal Wilfred Freeman, the Permanent Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office, Sir Alexander Cadogan, Churchill's scientific advisor, Lord Cherwell, journalist and travel writer Henry Vollam Morton, the novelist Howard Spring, and Harry Hopkins, President Roosevelt's chief emissary to the British Prime Minister.

At 00.30 hours the next morning, *Prince of Wales* weighed anchor in bad weather and, escorted by three destroyers, set course for Iceland. Her ultimate destination, however, was Placentia Bay, Newfoundland, where Churchill was destined to meet the US President face-to-face for the first time since World War One (the pair had met in London in July 1918) in a gathering that was codenamed *Riviera.*

With the imminent threat of America being drawn into the war due to rising tensions with Japan, the US President needed to fully understand the man who would become his most important ally. As for Churchill, he knew that it was only with America's military and industrial might that Germany could be defeated. It was against this backdrop that HMS *Prince of Wales* ploughed its way across the U-boat infested waters of the North Atlantic towards North America.

During the passage, Churchill took great interest in the details of the event that was about to take place. During the battleship's passage, for example, he was particularly concerned that Roosevelt should be correctly received when he arrived on board *Prince of Wales*, so he personally conducted a series of rehearsals. Cadogan, Winston decided, was to play the part of Roosevelt.

"In obedience to Churchill," the late Gordon Smith wrote, "Cadogan raised his hat to pretend he had just arrived. Right on cue the Marines struck up *The Star-Spangled Banner*. The order, "Present Arms", rang out. The guard of honour responded. Churchill came forward and shook hands with Cadogan, who was composed and dignified on being suitably greeted by the Chiefs of Staff and the battleship's officers. The rehearsal was punctuated with suggestions from Churchill until he was satisfied the ceremonial would be a worthy tribute to the President of the United States."



USS *McDougal*, with President Roosevelt on board, pulls alongside HMS *Prince of Wales* in Placentia Bay, Newfoundland, August 10, 1941. (USNHHC)

HMS *Prince of Wales* at anchor off Argentia, Newfoundland, after bringing Prime Minister Winston Churchill across the Atlantic to meet with President Franklin D Roosevelt. This picture was taken from USS *Augusta*. (USNHHC)

Winston Churchill boards USS *Augusta* to confer with President Roosevelt. The Prime Minister was welcomed aboard by Admiral Ernst J King. (National Museum of the US Navy)

Winston Churchill pictured walking the deck of HMS *Prince of Wales* during the Atlantic Conference, 1941. (Historic Military Press)

At 08.30 hours on August 9, HMS *Prince of Wales* entered Placentia Bay and anchored off the town of Argentia. President Roosevelt had already arrived on the heavy cruiser USS *Augusta*. At 11.00 hours Churchill visited the President on *Augusta*. "At long last, Mr. President", welcomed Churchill. Roosevelt responded by declaring, "Glad to have you aboard, Mr. Churchill". Stepping forward, Churchill presented his American counterpart with a letter from King George VI. *Riviera* was underway.

The church service underway on HMS *Prince of Wales*. President Roosevelt and Winston Churchill can be seen seated in the centre of the image. (USNHHC)

The following morning the Prime Minister's carefully choreographed welcome ceremony was put to the test. Churchill described the scene in his memoirs: "On Sunday morning, August 10, Mr. Roosevelt came aboard H.M.S. *Prince of Wales* and, with his Staff officers and several hundred representatives of all ranks of the United States Navy and Marines, attended Divine Service on the quarterdeck. This service was felt by us all to be a deeply moving expression of the unity of faith of our two peoples, and none who took part in it will forget the spectacle presented that sunlit morning… the symbolism of the Union Jack and the Stars and Stripes draped side by side."

Over the next two days, the two leaders conducted a series of meetings to discuss their respective war aims for World War Two and to outline a postwar international system. The most important consequence of *Riviera* was the issuing of a joint statement which was officially announced on August 14. It was a document that was soon dubbed "The Atlantic Charter".

With this agreed, at 14.50 hours on August 13, President Roosevelt and his staff assembled on *Augusta*'s quarterdeck to bid Churchill and his staff farewell. At 17.00 hours *Prince of Wales* set sail, passed close to *Augusta* and rendered passing honours, after which the Royal Marine band stuck up *Auld Lang Syne*. Heading out into the open waters of the Atlantic, the battleship and its escort set course for Iceland.

On the afternoon of August 15, when Churchill's small flotilla was just over halfway to Iceland, it rendezvoused with the east-bound convoy HX 143 which consisted of 73 merchant ships and their escorts. Seizing the opportunity, Churchill instructed that *Prince of Wales* should steam right through the centre of the convoy, flying the signal "Bon Voyage, Churchill" as it did so. All the while, Churchill stood at the rail waving, to be greeted by the convoy hooting in reply. Churchill so enjoyed the experience that he ordered Captain John Catterall, the battleship's commander, to reverse course and repeat the manoeuvre.

In laying out the guidelines for how nations should inter-act with each other in times of peace, the Charter included eight "common principles" that both the UK and the US committed to support. The two countries agreed not to seek territorial expansion; to seek the liberalization of international trade; and to establish freedom of the seas, and international labour, economic, and welfare standards. Most importantly, both nations were committed to supporting the restoration of self-governments for all countries that had been occupied during the war and allowing all peoples to choose their own form of government.

The document, therefore, lay much of the groundwork for the subsequent creation of the United Nations and even NATO. But there was much more to the two leaders' meeting. The friendship and understanding which developed between FDR and Churchill during the four days they spent together cemented a relationship that, above all others, would, in time, prove vital to the outcome of World War Two.

HMS *Prince of Wales* meets the Atlantic Convoy HX 143 during the return journey from the *Riviera* conference. (National Museum of the US Navy)

NATIONAL FIRE SERVICE FORMED

The Luftwaffe's aerial onslaught against the United Kingdom between September 1940 and the spring of 1941 laid bare a serious flaw in the nation's Home Front defences – namely that there were no less than 1,000 individual fire authorities in England and Wales alone (there were 1,600 nationally), all of which were operating with an auxiliary fire service attached. At the same time, each of these forces had grown in size to accommodate the scale of the threat that the Blitz represented.

Such a situation threw "into strong relief the more obvious weaknesses of the country's Fire Brigade organization". The Home Office, for its part, had the challenging task of dealing with each of these fire authorities separately. Though the Luftwaffe's presence over the UK had waned since the devastating attack on London during the night of May 10/11, something still needed to be done.

The answer was to bring all of the individual brigades under one command. As a result, the National Fire Service officially came into being on August 18, 1941. Its first commander, and, indeed, its only commander, was Sir Aylmer Firebrace. The former Chief Officer of the London Fire Brigade, Firebrace remained in post throughout the war.

In his memoirs, Sir Aylmer recalled this dramatic step: "The Fire Service revolution of 1941, with its great changes affecting every aspect of its life, had to be carried through whilst it stood poised, not only for the usual steady stream of accidental fires, but also for possible heavy raids by the enemy. It meant incessant work and constant anxiety for the officers on the ground. An Army battalion can come out of the line to rest and refit; a ship's company can go on leave whilst the ship is in dockyard hands; but there is never a moment's let up for the Fire Service.

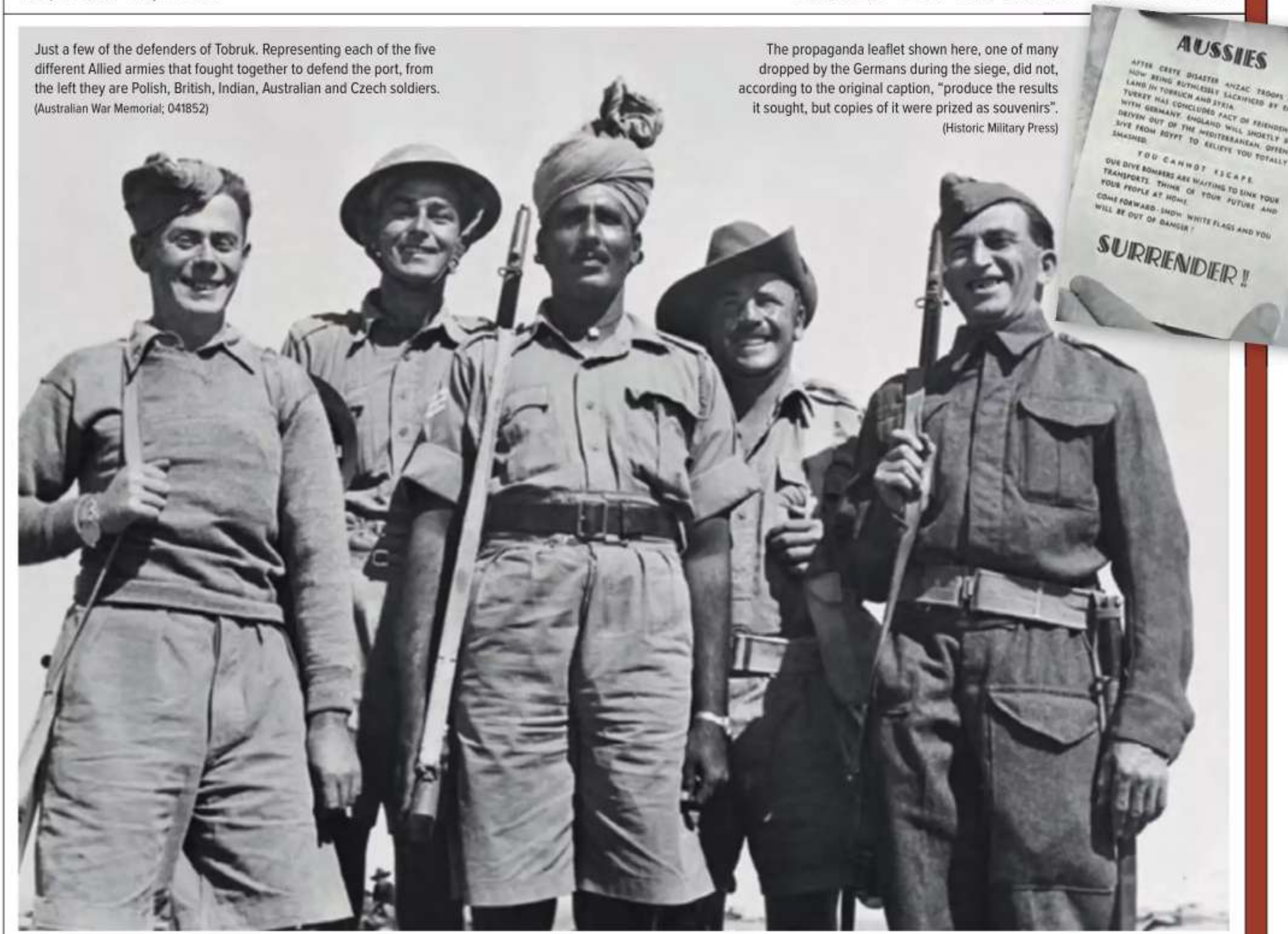
"The advantages of a nationalized Fire Service were progressively felt, as it had time to settle down. So much was now possible that before was quite impossible, or only feasible after discussion, compromise, and delay. An ounce of unity of command was seen to be worth any quantity of voluntary co-operation, however much the latter was lubricated with goodwill.

National Fire Service personnel at work on a fire in Britannia Row, off Essex Road, the blaze being the result of enemy action. (Historic Military Press)

The aftermath of a V-1 flying bomb incident at a wing of the Moorfields Hospital, City Road, London, on July 29, 1944. The original caption states that the picture shows 'NFS fighting fire which broke out in the wreckage'. (Historic Military Press)

"Reinforcements on any scale could now be moved freely to wherever they were required, whilst those actually engaged in fighting fires were able to recognize who was the senior present and gradually came to speak the same Fire Service language… Now the full firefighting resources of the country were available anywhere, and of course, free of charge… The N.F.S. developed rapidly. Town and rural fire brigades were now brought together to their mutual advantage; each has much to learn from the other. The best use could be made of every individual in the Service."

With both full-time and part-time members, at its peak, the NFS had 370,000 personnel, including some 80,000 firewomen. Fire drills and equipment were standardised. It remained in existence until 1948.



Just a few of the defenders of Tobruk. Representing each of the five different Allied armies that fought together to defend the port, from the left they are Polish, British, Indian, Australian and Czech soldiers. (Australian War Memorial; 041852)

AUSSIES

AFTER CRETE DISASTER ANZAC TROOPS ARE NOW BEING RUTHLESSLY SACRIFICED BY ENGLAND IN TOBRUCH AND SYRIA.

TURKEY HAS CONCLUDED PACT OF FRIENDSHIP WITH GERMANY. ENGLAND WILL SHORTLY BE DRIVEN OUT OF THE MEDITERRANEAN. OFFENSIVE FROM EGYPT TO RELIEVE YOU TOTALLY SMASHED.

YOU CANNOT ESCAPE.

OUR DIVE BOMBERS ARE WAITING TO SINK YOUR TRANSPORTS. THINK OF YOUR FUTURE AND YOUR PEOPLE AT HOME.

COME FORWARD - SHOW WHITE FLAGS AND YOU WILL BE OUT OF DANGER!

SURRENDER!

The propaganda leaflet shown here, one of many dropped by the Germans during the siege, did not, according to the original caption, "produce the results it sought, but copies of it were prized as souvenirs". (Historic Military Press)

RELIEF FOR THE RATS OF TOBRUK

Much-needed reinforcements reached the beleaguered port of Tobruk during the night of August 18/19, 1941. Conditions inside the perimeter were difficult, as the Australian War Memorial notes: "[The] defenders at Tobruk had to adjust to life in stifling heat, under constant artillery and air bombardment. Supplies of food and water decreased, and the troops were plagued by flies, fleas and illness."

The infamous Lord Haw-Haw derisively referred to the Allied garrison as the "poor desert rats of Tobruk" during his radio broadcasts. The Australians, far from being offended, adopted the term as their own, proudly declaring themselves to be the Rats of Tobruk. However, the conditions gradually took their toll. Indeed, Lieutenant-General Thomas Blamey, the Australian commander, noted that the health of the Australian 9th Division had deteriorated "to the point where it was no longer capable of resisting attack". Something had to be done, and that came in the form of Operation *Treacle*.

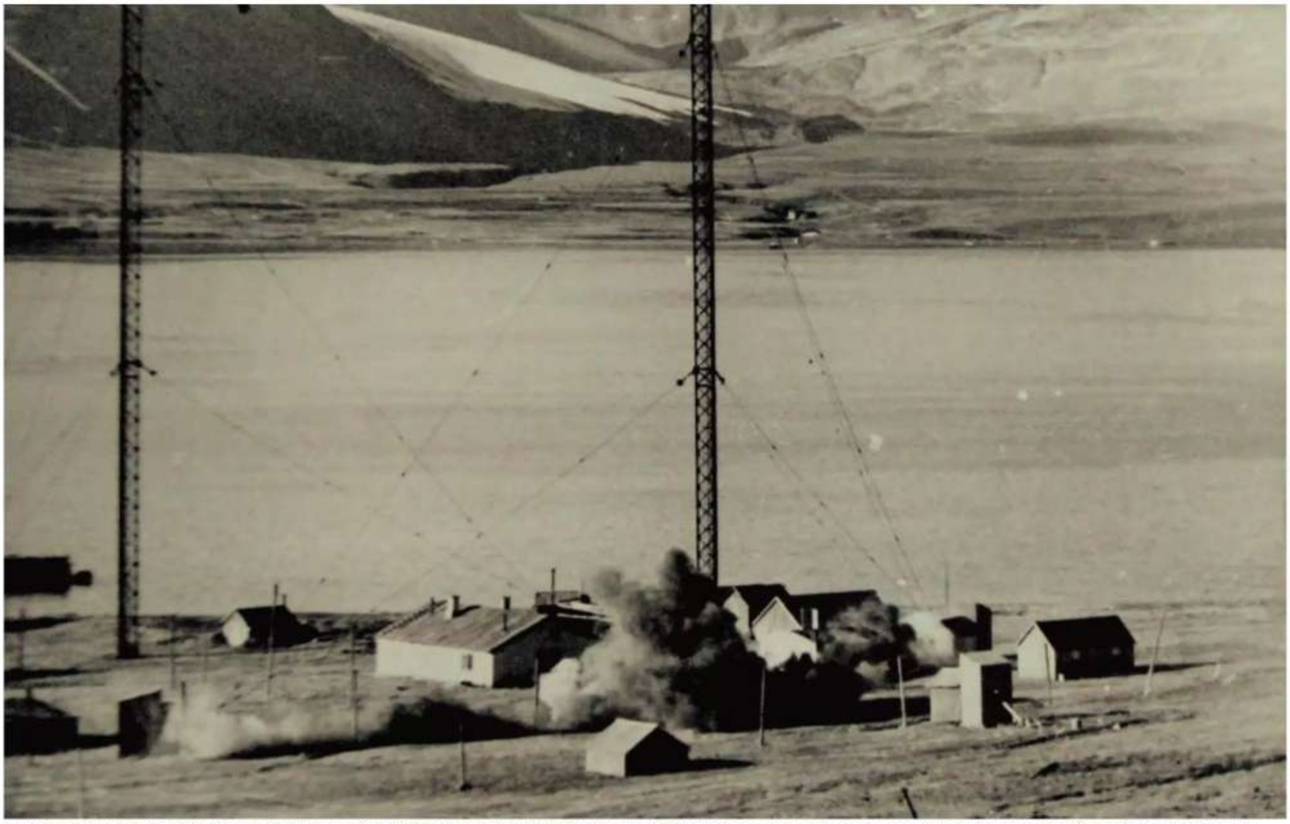
For a large part of the men defending the town, their departure finally came on the moonless night of August 18/19 when *Treacle* was carried out. In a well-planned and executed scheme, 5,040 men of the Australian Infantry Brigade and the Indian Army's 18th King Edward's Own Cavalry were replaced by the Polish Carpathian Brigade and the Czechoslovak 11th Infantry Battalion. The operation went without a hitch under the very noses of the Germans.

The scheme was carried out by three destroyers and a minelayer working in pairs, with a third destroyer taking in much-needed supplies. The destroyers were allowed just 30 minutes alongside. After that time the ships were to depart whether they had completed their unloading and loading or not. To get the troops off quickly, the men simply slid (or were slung by the seats of their pants) down a sloping board, some onto the quayside, others onto partly submerged ships in the harbour. The departing Australians needed no encouragement to board the destroyers without delay.

In two further naval operations in September and October, codenamed *Supercharge* and *Cultivate* respectively, the greater part of the rest of the original garrison was recovered and shipped to Alexandria. Only one unit, the Australian 2/13 Infantry Battalion, could not be evacuated and was forced to remain in the besieged town until the siege was finally lifted.

It was the launching of Operation *Crusader* in November 1941 that finally broke Rommel's grip on Tobruk. Under pressure from the Allied offensive, Rommel was forced to abandon the siege on December 7, and his men began to fall back towards Tripoli.

The siege had lasted for a staggering 242 days. For the defenders, it had been a costly battle, for between April and October the garrison suffered nearly 4,000 casualties – mostly Australian. More were killed and wounded during the siege's final weeks. Nevertheless, holding Tobruk had been an epic of endurance and an impressive feat of arms; it was one of the longest sieges in British military history.



The radio station at Barentsburg is blown up by Royal Engineers just prior to the Allied withdrawal. Up until the last moment, false weather reports were being despatched in an effort to keep German reconnaissance aircraft from approaching the islands. (Historic Military Press)

OPERATION GAUNTLET

A remote cluster of islands located some 650 miles south of the North Pole, the Svalbard archipelago, whose largest island was Spitzbergen, assumed a heightened strategic importance following Operation *Barbarossa*. Not only did the archipelago lie astride the new Arctic convoy routes to Russia, but the various islands were home to large coal mines, operated by both Norway and Russia, as well as wireless and meteorological stations.

By the end of July 1941, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff issued instructions for the islands to be neutralised. The plans were finalised by August 16, with the aims of Operation *Gauntlet* being the destruction or removal of the various coal mining facilities, any stocks of coal, the transport facilities between mines and wharves, any harbour facilities, and the wireless and meteorological stations. The Norwegian and Russian populations were to be evacuated.

The sizeable force put together for *Gauntlet* relied heavily on Canadian personnel, who were, in turn, supported by a number of British and Free Norwegian units. The ships carrying the raiders sailed on August 19, initially heading to Hvalfjord in Iceland to refuel. By the morning of the 25th, the warships were off Spitsbergen. The landings began at 04.30 hours when a party of signallers went ashore by the wireless station at Kap Linne, where the Norwegian staff greeted them "cordially". By 08.00 hours, the larger ships had anchored off Barentsburg, a Russian mining village.

A correspondent for *Life* magazine wrote the following account: "At 6 a.m. …they saw the sharp white peaks of Spitsbergen, for which the island was named. Scouting planes went ahead to see if there were Germans to oppose the landing. There were none. As they slipped between the high walls of the fjord leading to Barentsburg, no German shells screamed past them. Instead, they were welcomed with great cheers by Norwegians, Russian coal miners and a handful of Free French soldiers who had escaped from Germany.

"Working fast the British sappers did their job. They set fire to 400,000 tons of coal dumps and 125,000 gallons of fuel oil. They destroyed or removed all the elaborate modern machinery that mined and loaded the coal. They blasted the long tunnels bored into the carboniferous mountains… They left nothing but wreckage for any German expedition."

The burning fires at Barentsburg left a lasting impression on those who were present. One witness recalled, "exploding barrels were seen to a height of about 250 feet and were thrown out from the pile, flaming, to a distance of 350 to 400 feet".

During the night of August 26-27, the RMS *Empress of Canada* finished embarking the Russian civilians and set sail for Archangel. She returned on September 1, and promptly began boarding the entire Norwegian population of Spitzbergen, about 800 people. Leaving the island devoid of humans, the liner weighed anchor at 22.30 hours the following day. With their work done, the last of the raiders had re-embarked without suffering any casualties on September 3.

Norwegian civilians preparing to be evacuated from Longyearbyen, the largest inhabited area of Svalbard, and the world's northernmost settlement. (Historic Military Press)

THE INVASION OF IRAN

As we have already seen, the oil that powered the engines of Britain's war came predominantly from the Middle East. After the British forces had occupied Iraq earlier in 1941, the next target was oil-rich Iran, but to the north of that country was the mighty Soviet Union. As long as Germany and Russia remained allies, Britain could never risk invading Iran – but that changed following *Barbarossa*.

A concerted Anglo-Soviet attack on neutral Iran was hastily planned for August 1941. As a pretext for invading the country it was said that large numbers of German nationals had been allowed into Iran posing as tourists. This "nest of Nazi intriguers" had to be destroyed.

The Anglo-Soviet invasion, which to the British was known as Operation *Countenance*, began on August 25, with Russian troops advancing through the Caucasus and Azerbaijan towards the Iranian capital, Tehran, while British and Commonwealth forces under General Wavell landed on the Gulf coast and occupied the Abadan oil refineries. This included British troops being air-lifted from their bases in Iraq – a move which was, at that time, the largest airborne operation of its kind attempted by the RAF.

As Wavell's troops moved up country towards Tehran, encountering little resistance from the Iranians, the Soviets consolidated their hold upon northern Iran. Against nine Iranian infantry divisions, the British deployed the 8th and 10th Infantry Divisions, the 2nd Indian Armoured Brigade, the 9th Armoured Brigade and the 21st Indian Infantry Brigade. The Russians, despite the pressure exerted by the fighting on the Eastern Front, showed really serious intent, mobilizing no less than three whole army corps.

By August 28, the Shah, who was considered pro-German, had abdicated and been forced into exile. A new government was formed, and the Iranian forces surrendered.

Five days after the Iranians had laid down their arms, the British and the Soviets came into direct contact with each other for the first time. This happened near the city of Kasvin, some 90 miles northwest of Tehran, on September 1.

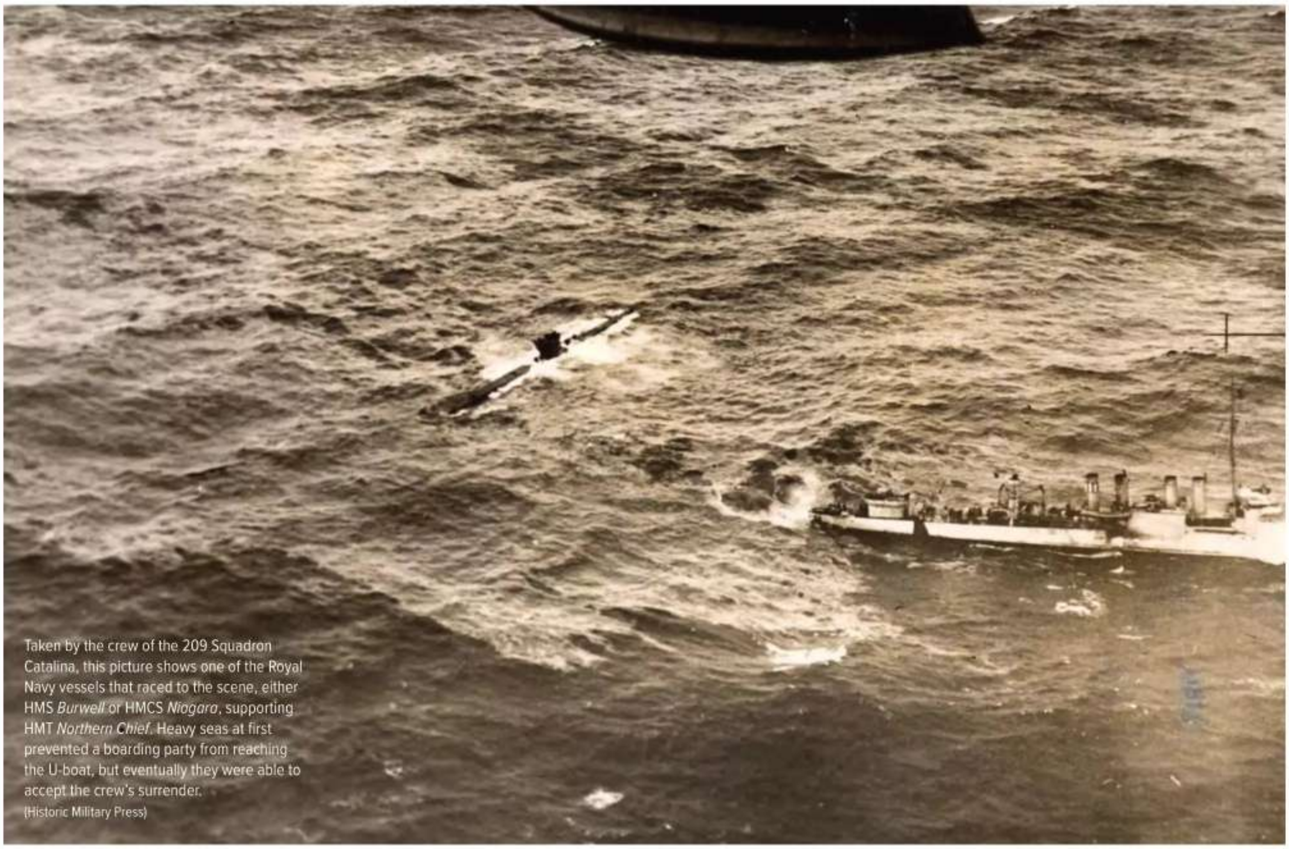
That first meeting between East and West was witnessed by an Australian journalist, Alan Moorhead. He recorded the following in his book *African Trilogy*: "It was a truckload of troops who seemed at first to be Nazis. They sat four abreast in gabardine tunics and jackboots. They had German [style] helmets on their heads, and each man, sitting bolt upright, clasped a rifle with a fixed bayonet… We ran alongside. Looking up into their faces, we saw young men with fair hair and blue eyes and round brown cheeks. Hand grenades were strapped to their waists and on their superb shoulders were strapped cartridge belts. Every rifle was automatic."

With Iran under Allied control, access to the vital oil supplies was assured. At the same time, a new supply route into Russia had been opened up. Alongside the Atlantic convoys, the Persian Corridor, as it came to be known, would prove vital in the battle against the Axis.

A still from a wartime news reel showing Soviet and British Commonwealth officers during the first meeting near Kasvin on September 1, 1941. (Critical Past)

استعمال دخانیات ممنوع است
SMOKING NOT ALLOWED
استعمال دخانیات ممنوع است
SMOKING NOT ALLOWED

Indian soldiers enter what was then the world's largest oil refinery on Abadan Island, Iran, as part of Operation *Countenance*. (Everett Collection/Shutterstock)



Taken by the crew of the 209 Squadron Catalina, this picture shows one of the Royal Navy vessels that raced to the scene, either HMS *Burwell* or HMCS *Niagara*, supporting HMT *Northern Chief*. Heavy seas at first prevented a boarding party from reaching the U-boat, but eventually they were able to accept the crew's surrender. (Historic Military Press)

U-570 CAPTURED

The Battle of the Atlantic and the war against the U-boats took a dramatic turn on August 27, 1941, with the capture of the Type VIIC U-boat *U-570*. That day, Coastal Command's 269 Squadron had nine serviceable Lockheed Hudsons available for operations. One of those duly sent out on anti-submarine patrols was the Hudson flown by Sergeant Mitchell. At 06.40 hours, Mitchell was roughly 65 miles south of Iceland when he sighted a swirl and a wake at a distance of 800 yards. He and his crew immediately commenced a thorough search. At 07.30 hours, their persistence paid off when a U-boat was sighted on the surface roughly one mile away.

Mitchell dived in to attack from 800 feet, but frustratingly his depth charges failed to release. A square search was maintained until 12.20 hours, by which time the Hudson was forced to return to base.

Meanwhile, Squadron Leader James Thompson was at the controls of one of three of 269 Squadron's aircraft allocated to undertake a strike. He and his crew were airborne by 08.45 hours, and soon en route to the location reported by Mitchell.

Once on scene, though by now about 80 miles south of Iceland, Thompson's crew also sighted a fully surfaced U-boat. Thompson immediately attacked, dropping four depth charges from a height of 50 feet. The squadron's Operational Record Book states that they "hit" the U-boat which was straddled.

A minute after the disturbance from the explosions ceased, the U-boat began diving, only to re-surface with its bows down, at which point a number of the submarine's crew appeared on deck. It was attacked by the Hudson with machine-gun fire until a white flag was waved. More of the crew then appeared, this time displaying a large white board.

The Hudson's crew requested assistance and was relieved by a Catalina from 209 Squadron at 13.45 hours. An anti-submarine trawler, HMT *Northern Chief* arrived at 22.50 hours, having been guided by flares dropped by the Catalina. *U-570* was finally taken under tow.

Kapitänleutnant Hans-Joachim Rahmlow, *U-570*'s commander, later recalled the dramatic events after Thompson's depth charges detonated: "We dropped lower, how low we did not know as our instruments were no longer functioning. We only knew sooner or later the point would be reached when the surrounding water pressure would crush the Boat. In that situation the only course was to blow out the ballast tanks immediately with compressed air.

"I gave the order for this and brought the Boat to the surface. The Boat was no longer fit to submerge and hence robbed of its effective strength – on the surface we could not escape the aircraft which kept contact with us and was later relieved by yet another aircraft, until the arrival of the first Patrol Boat." Rahmlow failed in his intention to scuttle his command.

Towed to Iceland, where it gave up valuable information, *U-570* was subsequently repaired and entered service with the Royal Navy having been re-named HMS *Graph*.

Squadron Leader James H Thompson, on the far right, poses with a flag recovered from *U-570*. In a BBC broadcast, Thompson stated: "We owe the Navy a personal word of thanks... They came down to our station and handed over to the squadron a rather wonderful memento of the occasion, a memento of which we shall always be very proud – the U-boat's flag." (Courtesy of the late Andrew Hendrie)

THE GREER INCIDENT

The growing threat presented by Hitler's U-boats in the waters of the Atlantic was a subject of increasing concern to President Roosevelt in the spring of 1941. Like most Allied leaders, it was clear to him that the war had the potential to be won or lost in the Atlantic. On April 2, 1941, he therefore held discussions with his senior advisors regarding the possibility of providing US Navy escorts for British convoys. Despite the Unites States' neutrality, the President directed his naval commanders to "prepare plans for such an undertaking", particularly in US and Icelandic waters.

One of the warships assigned to take up patrol duties in the North Atlantic was the Wickes-class destroyer USS *Greer* (DD-145). At 08.40 hours on the morning of September 4, *Greer*, carrying mail and passengers for the new US garrison on Iceland, was alerted to the presence of a submerged submarine about ten miles ahead by a patrolling British aircraft. *Greer* soon located the submarine, *U-652*, by sonar and began tracking it.

The British aircraft then attacked *U-652* with depth-charges. The U-boat's captain, Oberleutnant zur See Georg-Werner Fraatz, seemingly mis-identified *Greer* as one of the warships supplied by the US to the Royal Navy under the 'Destroyers for Bases Deal' agreed in 1940 and attacked, firing a torpedo at the US warship.

Greer immediately responded in kind, and a two-hour battle ensued. During this, 19 depth charges were dropped by the destroyer, while Fraatz fired another torpedo. Despite this, no damage to either side. Though *Greer* was not damaged in the attack, her depth charges damaged *U-652*. *Greer* was the first US warship to fire on a German vessel in World War Two.

Roosevelt seized on 'The Greer Incident' to forward his own agenda regarding the United States' involvement in the war. In one of his famous "Fireside Chats", the 18th that he had broadcast, he stated: "*Greer*… was flying the American flag. Her identity as an American ship was unmistakable. She was then and there attacked by a submarine. Germany admits that it was a German submarine. The submarine deliberately fired a torpedo at the *Greer*, followed later by another torpedo attack.

President Roosevelt pictured in the White House delivering his 'Fireside Chat' about the 'Greer Incident', September 11, 1941. He is wearing a black arm band whilst mourning the death of his mother, Sara Delano Roosevelt, on September 7, 1941. (NARA)

KEEP'EM FLYING
KEEP'EM
MBS
CBS
NBC

"In spite of what Hitler's propaganda bureau has invented, and in spite of what any American obstructionist organization may prefer to believe, I tell you the blunt fact that the German submarine fired first upon this American destroyer without warning, and with deliberate design to sink her. Our destroyer, at the time, was in waters which the Government of the United States had declared to be waters of self-defense – surrounding outposts of American protection in the Atlantic."

As a result of the attack, Roosevelt ordered the US Navy to protect Lend Lease convoys. He also issued his "shoot-on-sight" order, directing the US Navy to attack any ship threatening American shipping or foreign shipping under escort. His "undeclared war" between Axis U-boats and US escorts escalated dramatically from this point.

USS *Greer* (DD-145) pictured following the attack on September 4, 1941. This picture was taken at sea off New York in June 1943. (National Museum of the US Navy)

THE SIEGE OF LENINGRAD

Having been unleashed on the morning of June 22, it took Generalfeldmarschall Wilhelm Ritter von Leeb's Army Group North just 12 days to sweep through the Baltic states and reach the outskirts of Leningrad. There, though, his men were brought to a crashing halt.

Though incomplete, Leningrad's hurriedly-constructed fortifications were extensive. They included 5,000 earth, timber and concrete pillboxes, more than 370 miles of barbed wire, around 620 miles of earthen walls, over 400 miles of anti-tank ditches and 185 miles of wood abates or stakes. The former Russian capital, and still the nation's cultural heart, was clearly too large for Army Group North to capture, so Hitler decided to besiege it and cut it off from the rest of the Soviet Union. The Siege of Leningrad would become one of the longest and most destructive in history.

Assisted by the Finnish 4th Corps, von Leeb's men completed their encirclement of Leningrad by September 25. Four days later the Luftwaffe began a series of massive aerial bombardments.

Some historians and authors believe that Hitler's intentions had been to completely raze the city to the ground – belying its importance as a political, naval, regional and industrial centre. In her book *Leningrad*, Anna Reid makes reference to a directive sent to Army Group North on September 29: "After the defeat of Soviet Russia there can be no interest in the continued existence of this large urban centre... Following the city's encirclement, requests for surrender negotiations shall be denied, since the problem of relocating and feeding the population cannot and should not be solved by us. In this war for our very existence, we can have no interest in maintaining even a part of this very large urban population."

German soldiers at work expanding and reinforcing a gun emplacement on the Leningrad Front during the Siege. (Historic Military Press)

Apart from the immediate loss of life, the bombing had a profound effect upon the city, for all main food warehouses were destroyed and burned in massive fires. Huge amounts of stored food reserves, such as grain, flour and sugar, were completely destroyed. In one instance, melted sugar from the warehouses had flowed through the floors into the surrounding soil. Desperate citizens began digging up the frozen earth in an attempt to extract the sugar.

To organise the defence of the city, Stalin called on the one man he had come to rely on – General Georgy Zhukov. When he arrived there in September, he found the garrison and the population already suffering shortages because of the destruction of the warehouses. By October the city was facing starvation.

A pair of Panzer IIIs halted during the German advance towards Leningrad. A note on the rear of the picture indicates that it was taken near Krasnoye, a town to the south-east of Leningrad. (Historic Military Press)

Civilians and military personnel alike work to repair the damage caused during a German air raid on Leningrad, January 1, 1942. (RIA Novosti Archive, #601181/Boris Kudoyarov/CC-BY-SA 3.0)

90.0 Выборг
Ленинград 52.0

A soldier from the Finnish 4th Corps poses by a signpost during the advance on Leningrad, September 2, 1941. It indicates that the city is just 52 km, or 32 miles, away. (SA-kuva)

In an effort to sustain the garrison, and the remaining civilians trapped within the city's confines, every effort was concentrated on getting supplies into Leningrad. Thin ice prevented supplies being moved over Lake Lagoda, which soon became a battle zone between German, Finnish and Italian light naval forces and the Soviet Lagoda Naval Flotilla. Attacks were mounted by the Red Army on the besiegers' positions and counter moves were made by the Germans.

This was to be no desultory siege reminiscent of bygone eras, it would be one of repeated attack and counter-attack, but also of increasing desperation inside the beleaguered city. "The horror of the siege was how death became routine," wrote one survivor, Oleg Bushuev. "In the winter of '41-2 people just collapsed and died on the streets."

Another civilian recorded similar scenes: "When you walk down the streets, you come across dead bodies carried on sledges all the time. Most of them were being thrown into mass graves because people had no strength to make a coffin and dig out a grave."

As the surrounding Axis troops continued to enforce their siege, conditions inside Leningrad became increasingly desperate. Disease, the inevitable consequence of starvation, soon spread rapidly throughout the city. The same number of people died from diseases in December 1941 as had in the whole of 1940. By January 1942, around 4,000 people succumbed to one disease or another every single day.

"Horrible, only skeletons, not people," wrote Ivan Savinkov, a factory worker. "What will become of us?" In her diary, one resident, Aleksandra Liubovskaia , noted that, "Everyone is shrivelled, their breasts sunken in, their stomachs enormous, and instead of arms and legs just bones poke out through wrinkles".

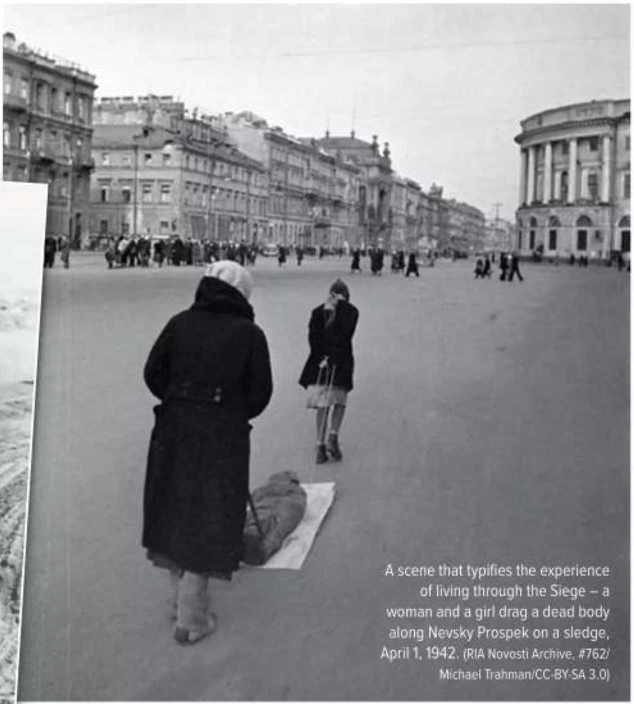
Public transport all but ceased to function. The historian and author Harrison E Salisbury, in *The Siege of Leningrad*, described one solution: "The children's sleds, suddenly they were everywhere – on the Nevsky, on Lavra, toward Piskarevsky, toward the hospitals. The squeak, squeak, squeak of the runners sounded louder than the shelling. It deafened the ears. On the sleds were the ill, the dying, the dead."

Vehicles using the so-called 'Road of Life', or 'Ice Road', across Lake Ladoga during the Siege of Leningrad. (Historic Military Press)

The soldiers of the Red Army were suffering just as severely as the citizens of Leningrad. Nor was there any way to bolster their ranks, with the city under blockade. Throughout the whole of the winter of 1941-2, the Leningrad Front grew by just 25,000 men: other fronts received reinforcements that were counted in their hundreds of thousands. Such paltry numbers could not make up for the losses that were being sustained every day. From October 1941 to April 1942, exclusive of those killed, 353,424 troops reported sick or wounded, an average of 50,000 a month or 1,700 a day.

During the bitterly cold winter of 1941-1942, Leningrad was rocked by a starvation epidemic that claimed as many as 100,000 lives per month. In their desperation, people ate everything from petroleum jelly and wallpaper glue to rats, pigeons and household pets. But, somehow, Leningrad survived that terrible first winter, and with the warmth of spring came hope that the situation inside the city would improve.

Such hopes were gradually dashed – despite the Red Army's efforts to break through to the beleaguered city. In fact, the Siege of Leningrad lasted for a staggering 872 days, during which time an estimated 1.3 million to 1.5 million defenders and civilians lost their lives; over 641,000 people died of hunger and 17,000 civilians were killed by shelling.

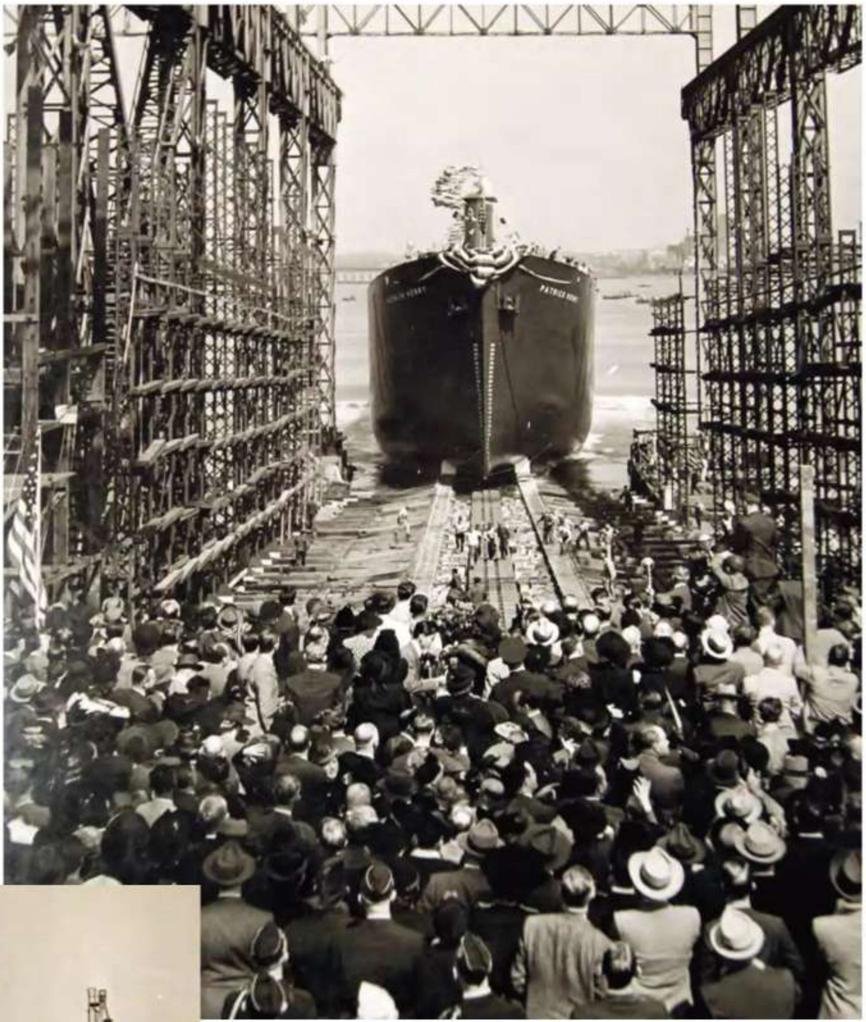


A scene that typifies the experience of living through the Siege – a woman and a girl drag a dead body along Nevsky Prospek on a sledge, April 1, 1942. (RIA Novosti Archive, #762/ Michael Trahman/CC-BY-SA 3.0)

FIRST LIBERTY SHIPS LAUNCHED

By the spring of 1941, the outcome of the Battle of the Atlantic still hung in the balance. It was a period in which Admiral Karl Dönitz, the senior submarine officer in the Kriegsmarine, seemed to be gaining the upper hand with his ever-expanding U-boat force – albeit that the expansion, started late in the summer of 1939, was still not proceeding at the rate he had hoped for. That said, the average number of U-boats at sea in the Atlantic steadily increased from about 18 in April 1941 to some 36 in August the same year. April 1941 also saw a total of 682,000 gross tons of Allied shipping being sunk, a higher figure than for any previous month in the war.

To replace this valuable shipping capacity, in September 1940 a British delegation had arrived in the United States armed with a set of designs for a merchant ship which it was hoped could be built on an unprecedented scale. The British concept was selected by the US Maritime Commission to form the basis of a new series of ships that undoubtedly represented one of the key developments in the Battle of the Atlantic. They quickly became known as the Liberty Ships.



Above: The world's first Liberty Ship, SS *Patrick Henry*, being launched on September 27, 1941. Below: SS *Patrick Henry* pictured immediately after her launch. The ship's fitting out process was completed on December 30, 1941. (Both National Museum of the US Navy)

They were to be built in existing yards in the minimum of time and with the additional aim of conserving materials vitally needed for the war effort. While reviewing blueprints at the White House, President Roosevelt remarked to the Maritime Commission's administrator, Admiral Emory S Land, that "I think this ship will do us very well. She'll carry a good load. She isn't much to look at, though, is she? A real ugly duckling." Thus, the Liberty ships received their nickname, the "Ugly Ducklings".

The 250,000 parts that were required for each vessel were prefabricated throughout the United States and formed into separate 250-ton sections. Where possible, the process involved replacing riveting with welding, which not only contributed to the dramatic speed of construction, but also a vital saving of material and dead weight in the completed ships. Once each section was ready, it was transported to one of 16 main yards across the United States where they were promptly welded into a complete unit. In fact, each ship contained 600,000 feet of welded joints, and of all the hours of labour needed to build one Liberty Ship, a third was taken up by the welding crews.

On average, the whole process took about 70 days. The record for the quickest build is held by the SS *Robert E. Peary*, which was completed in just four-and-a-half days. The first Liberty Ship, SS *Patrick Henry*, was launched on September 27, 1941, at the Bethlehem-Fairfield Yards in Baltimore, Maryland. Less than five months had passed from her initial keel-laying to launching. She was the first of several Liberty Ships to hit the water that Saturday – which was quickly named 'Liberty Fleet Day'.

Just like the men of Generalfeldmarschall Wilhelm Ritter von Leeb's Army Group North, the soldiers of Generalfeldmarschall Fedor von Bock's Army Group Centre had enjoyed remarkable success since the start of *Barbarossa*. By the latter half of July, they had advanced around 250 miles into Soviet territory and were already halfway to Moscow.

Once Smolensk was taken, it was believed that the panzers could be in the outskirts of the Soviet capital in a matter of days. But Hitler had other ideas. Altering his priorities, the Führer suddenly declared that he wanted to focus on taking Leningrad. Consequently, he ordered the 57th and 39th panzer corps to join Army Group North, at the same time ordering the 2nd Panzer Group to meet up with the 1st Panzer Group of Army Group South to help crush the Soviet South Western Front, and then move into the Ukraine.

Incredibly, the now severely weakened Army Group Centre was instructed to halt and consolidate the ground it had won and to mop up the small Soviet forces that had been bypassed in the rapid advance towards Moscow. The exact instruction was that, "Army Group Centre will go on the defensive, taking advantage of suitable terrain".

In the weeks that followed, the German northern and southern battle fronts soon found themselves facing an increasingly stiff Soviet defence. Hitler, searching for that all-important victory, switched his attention back to Army Group Centre. On September 16, 1941, von Bock was given permission to resume his advance on Moscow.

For what Hitler called "the last great battle of decision of the year", von Bock assembled a formidable force. As well as the return of the 2nd and 3rd panzer groups, a third joined Army Group Centre in the shape of the 4th Panzer Group. In total, this gave von Bock 1,000 tanks along with 1,929,000 men, 14,000 guns and mortars and nearly 1,400 aircraft. The capture of the Soviet capital was given the codename Operation *Taifun* (*Typhoon*).

Muscovites building fortifications in the face of the German onslaught, October 1941. (RIA Novosti Archive, #3500/B. Vdovenko/ CC-BY-SA 3.0)

The push for Moscow began on October 2. In true Blitzkrieg form, von Bock's men surged forward, overwhelming the Red Army units in front of them – despite the fact that the latter had used the time provided by Hitler's halt order to reinforce their front. Such was the scale of Army Group Centre's advance that the Soviet 19th, 20th, 24th and 32nd armies were encircled on October 7, as was another new formation, the Boldin Group.

These troops held out until October 13 before being forced to surrender. This saw an astonishing 650,000 Red Army troops lay down their weapons, which included more than 1,000 tanks and 4,000 pieces of artillery. In just two weeks, Army Group Centre had taken approximately 700,000 Soviet prisoners, constituting 45 divisions, and a huge amount of materiel. The gates to Moscow suddenly appeared to have been opened.

OPERATION TYPHOON

German troops pictured during the fighting for the town of Mzensk (also known as Mtsensk), some 185 miles south of Moscow on the Zusha River, during the autumn of 1941. (Historic Military Press)

Langsam fahren!

German troops crossing a bridge at Gzhatsk (now Gagarin) in late 1941. Gzhatsk is located on the Gzhat River. (Historic Military Press)

Civilians hard at work digging anti-tank ditches and barricades in Moscow, November 15, 1941. (RIA Novosti Archive, #789/Ustinov/CC-BY-SA 3.0)

Nothing, it seemed, could stop von Bock's men from taking the Soviet capital, with half of the troops designated to defend it already in captivity. It suddenly appeared that the Führer had been right all along, and that Moscow would be in German hands in a few days.

As a desperate last measure, Stalin called Georgy Konstantinovich Zhukov, Chief of the General Staff, and Deputy Minister of Defence, from Leningrad where he had successfully held up the Army Group North and told him to defend Moscow at all costs. The Soviets had planned the defence of their capital on three fortified lines, of which the Vyazma Defence Line had been the first, with the main one being the Mozhaisk Line (this formed an arc of more than 120 miles covering the western approaches to Moscow).

Tens of thousands of civilians and soldiers were drafted to build these makeshift defensive fortifications which, by the time the Germans reached them, comprised just 47 concrete and 103 wooden pillboxes, 70 anti-tank ditches, 45 escarped hillsides and 13 barbed-wire obstacles – hardly a barrier to von Bock's panzers. But, with victory seemingly within his grasp, von Bock was once more stymied by his superiors.

Not only were vital panzer units removed from his command, von Bock once again suffered the vagaries of Hitler's decision making. Mindful of how his troops had suffered casualties from booby traps when they entered Kiev, the Führer declared that Moscow, and other cities, should not be entered, merely encircled and then bombarded into submission. Operation *Typhoon* was proving to be anything but a whirlwind.

In this state of limbo, the notorious Russian winter crept up on the men of Army Group Centre. The situation soon became desperate. The German troops in the front-line were soon suffering from frostbite in temperatures well below freezing, with their vehicles immobilised from a lack of anti-freeze and their machine-guns jammed and useless. By the beginning of December, with the winter of 1941-2 proving to be the coldest of the twentieth century, Guderian had personally informed Hitler that the cold was killing twice as many men as the Red Army.

Though Hitler had declared that Moscow was to be encircled rather than captured, the failure to take Leningrad and the resistance still being encountered in the Ukraine, meant that he had neither defeated the Red Army nor achieved any of his strategic goals. But, if he could take Moscow, then victory might be his. So, despite the cold and the weakened condition of the German troops, Operation *Typhoon* was once more ordered to proceed.

The offensive was renewed by Erich Hoepner's 4th Panzer Group on the left, but in the face of the mud, then snow, as well as strong Russian counter-attacks, its progress was slow. Zhukov was able to strike at will against the flanks of the German columns while his troops in Moscow hit the enemy head on. The Soviets also made repeated attacks across the frozen River Moskva, forcing Hoepner to divert more and more men to check these thrusts.

The 2nd Panzer Division did actually get within sight of the Kremlin. That, though, was the nearest Hitler's men reached towards the heart of the Soviet capital.

Taken by a German soldier, this image depicts Axis military vehicles on the move, in extremely difficult conditions, during the fighting on the Eastern Front towards the end of 1941. (Historic Military Press)

Red Air Force aircraft flying over German positions near Moscow, December 1, 1941. (RIA Novosti Archive, #2564/ Samaryi Guraryi/CC-BY-SA 3.0)

USS *Kearny* en route to Reykjavik at ten knots after being torpedoed on October 17, 1941. (National Museum of the US Navy)

THE KEARNY INCIDENT

Following President Roosevelt's call for greater American involvement in the Battle of the Atlantic, despite the country's declared neutrality, the first trans-Atlantic convoy escorted by US warships sailed on September 16, 1941. As already seen, the first American warship attacked as a result of this policy was USS *Greer* on September 4. *Greer*, however, had not been damaged; the distinction of being the first US warship damaged by enemy attack in World War Two fell to the destroyer USS *Kearny* (DD-432), captained by Lieutenant Commander Anthony Leo Danis.

A relatively new vessel, *Kearny* had formally entered service on February 19, 1941. She was immediately put to work on the "Neutrality Patrol" off Martinique until March 9. It was in August that she sailed for Argentia, Newfoundland, to join an escort group that was supporting the North Atlantic convoys.

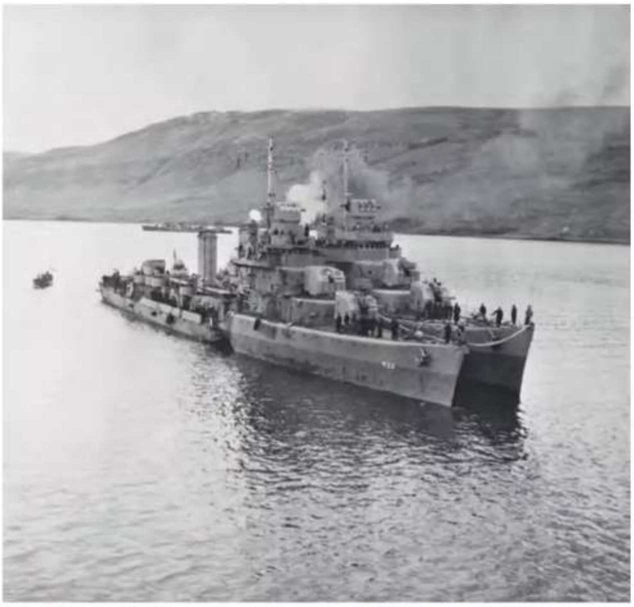
On October 5, 1941, the 53 ships of convoy SC-48 departed Sydney bound for the UK. Passing through the Belle Isle Strait, the convoy soon entered the waters of the North Atlantic and ploughed on towards its destination. As the presence of the lurking U-boat Wolf Packs began to make an impact, reinforcements were directed to support SC-48. One of the warships involved was USS *Kearny*, which, part of Escort Group 4.1.4, was detached from convoy ON-24.

On October 16, three merchant ships near *Kearny* were torpedoed. The destroyer immediately began dropping depth charges, a barrage that Danis's crew maintained throughout the night. Unbeknown to the American sailors, however, their ship was being stalked by one of the German attackers – the Type VIIC U-boat *U-568* commanded by Kapitänleutnant Joachim Preuss. In fact, every time Preuss attempted to get ahead of the convoy on its port side, he found his manoeuvres frustrated by a destroyer which he believed was British. It was USS *Kearny*.

At 04.15 hours on October 17, Preuss made his move. At a range of 2,000 metres, a spread of four torpedoes was fired by *U-568*. Preuss later reported that he observed one hit, and that the destroyer then broke in two and sank.

Kearny had just completed a sharp turn, to avoid colliding with a corvette, when the torpedo hit on the starboard side. The destroyer was temporarily disabled, but, contrary to Preuss' claims, did not sink. Reacting quickly, the crew confined the resulting flooding to the forward fire room, which enabled the ship to get out of the danger zone with power from the aft fire room. Regaining power in the forward fire room, *Kearny* limped towards Iceland at ten knots. One of the vessels assigned to escort her was USS *Greer*. Hvalfjordur was reached on the 19th. Eleven of the destroyer's crew had been killed in the attack, a further 22 injured.

Though *Kearny* survived the incident, it was only a matter of days before another US warship suffered a far worse fate. In the Battle of the Atlantic, the United States and Germany were literally drifting towards war.



The badly damaged USS *Kearny* pictured tied up alongside USS *Monssen* at Reykjavik on October 19. Note the hole in the destroyer's midships starboard side. After temporary repairs *Kearny* got underway again on Christmas Day 1941, and moored six days later at Boston for permanent repairs. (USNHHC)

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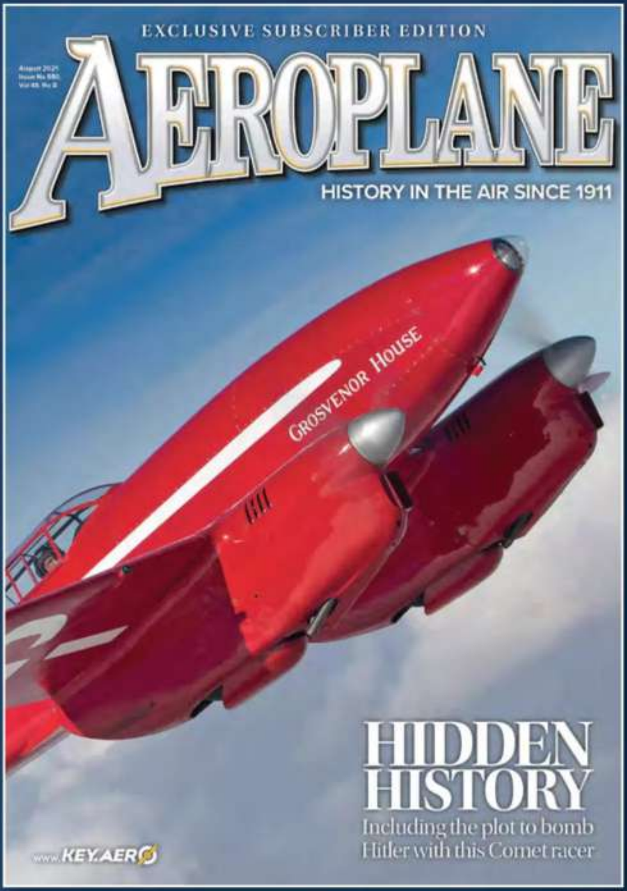
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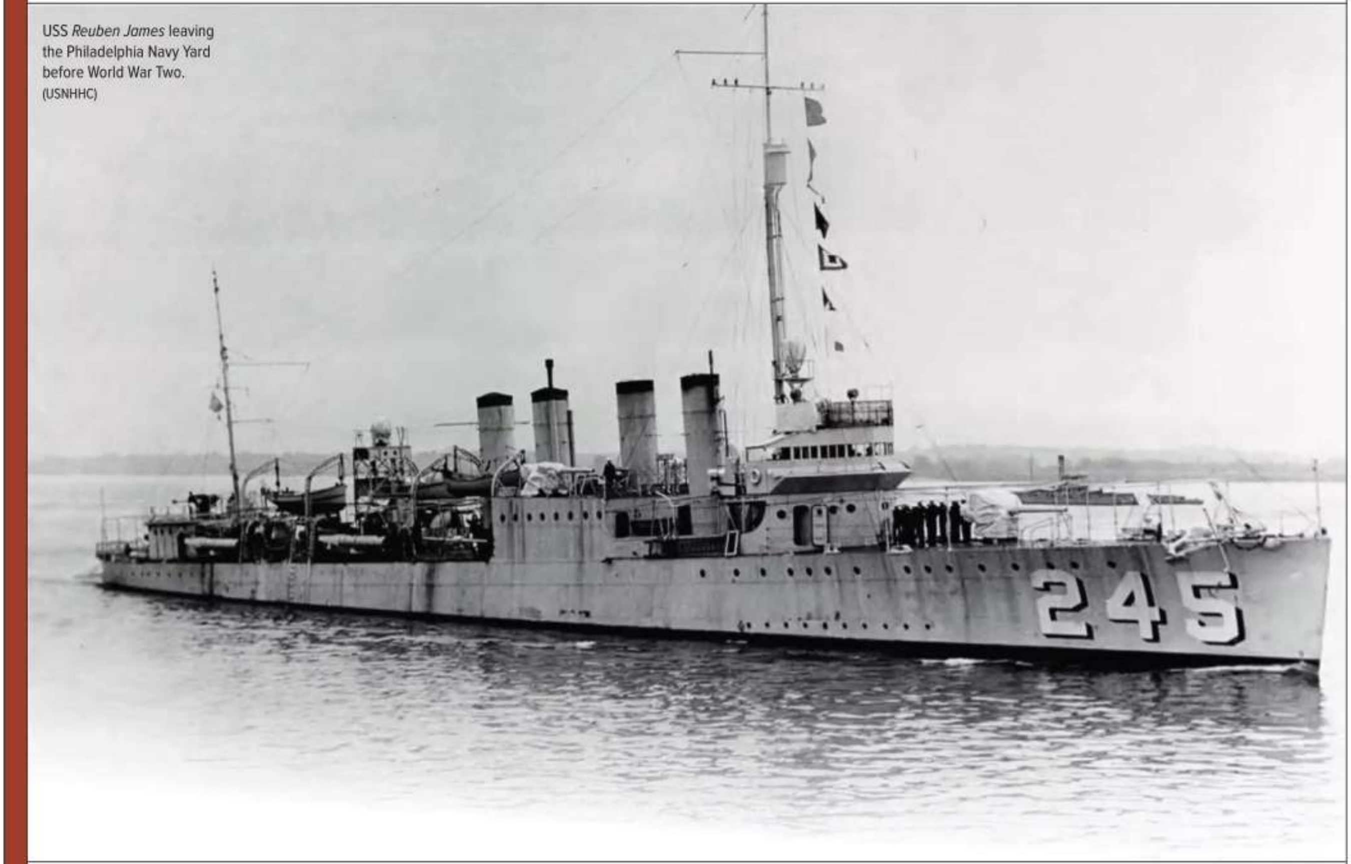
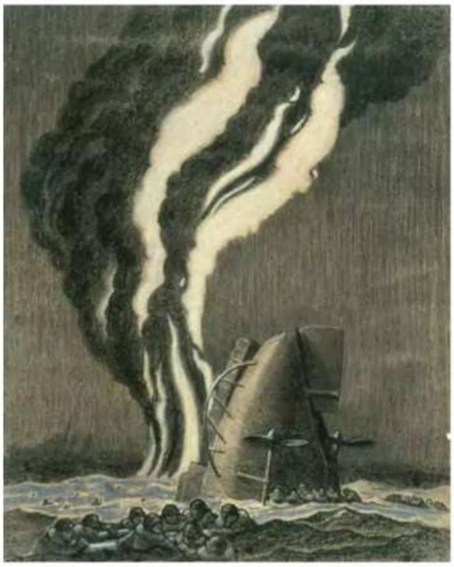


USS *Reuben James* leaving the Philadelphia Navy Yard before World War Two. (USNHHC)

FIRST US WARSHIP SUNK

By the end of September and beginning of October 1941, the US Navy was being inexorably drawn into the Battle of the Atlantic, in no small part because of the urging of President Roosevelt. Another of the American warships directed to enter what would be the longest campaign of World War Two was the elderly Clemson-class destroyer USS *Reuben James* (DD-245).

Ordered to join the escort for the eastbound convoy HX-156, USS *Reuben James* sailed from Newfoundland on October 23, 1941. Along with four other destroyers, she took up her station the following day. It was at 05.34 hours on the morning of the 31st that disaster struck, *Reuben James* having been singled out by Kapitänleutnant Erich Topp, the commander of *U-552*. The U-boat was less than a week out of St. Nazaire on its sixth war patrol.



A depiction of the sinking of USS *Reuben James* on October 31, 1941. (National Museum of the US Navy)

The US Navy's History and Heritage Command details what happened next: "Two torpedoes… punched into *Reuben James*'s port side as the destroyer steamed at roughly 8.8 knots in her night cruising position on the port quarter of HX-156. 'One or more explosions,' occurred in the vicinity of the forward fireroom, 'accompanied by a lurid orange flame and a high column of black smoke visible for several minutes at some miles'.

"The forward part of the ship open to the sea, *Reuben James* began to sink immediately, men emerging topside, aft, seeing nothing forward of number four stack within minutes of the explosions. Only F3c Parmie G. Appleton, the helmsman, and Cox. Gerald J. Delisle, the boatswain's mate of the watch, survived the blast forward. The other survivors comprised men 'berthed, or on watch, abaft the forward fireroom.'

"Her generators stopped, then auxiliary lights came on, only to go out soon thereafter, with no formal order to abandon ship, *Reuben James*'s sailors managed to launch three rafts and leapt overboard as the ship settled into the sea. Her commanding officer, having issued all hands lifejackets and told them to have them with them at all times, meant that many of the survivors, even in a short time, had them nearby. When the after part of the ship slipped into the sea, at least two depth charges exploded, killing or drowning an undetermined number of men in the heavy oil slick that had formed."

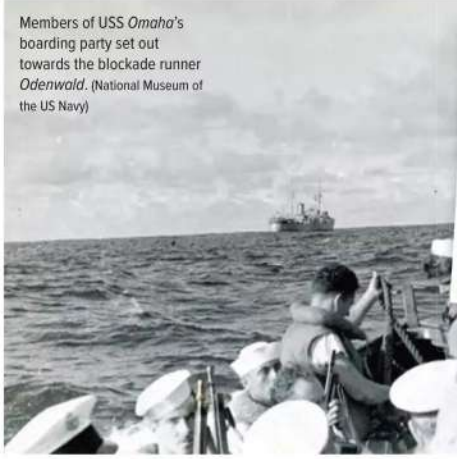
Within minutes, a rescue operation was underway. One man jumped from the deck of USS *Niblack* to help the struggling oil-covered survivors. This effort had to be abandoned, however, when further sonar contacts were picked up. All seven of *Reuben James*'s officers, including Lieutenant Commander Heywood L Edwards, the commanding officer, and 93 enlisted men lost their lives. Forty-four survived, though one of these individuals succumbed to his wounds on November 2, 1941.

USS *Reuben James* was the first US Navy ship lost to enemy action during World War Two. Though the official announcement was still a number of weeks away, the US Navy was now, to all intents and purposes, at war alongside the Royal Navy.

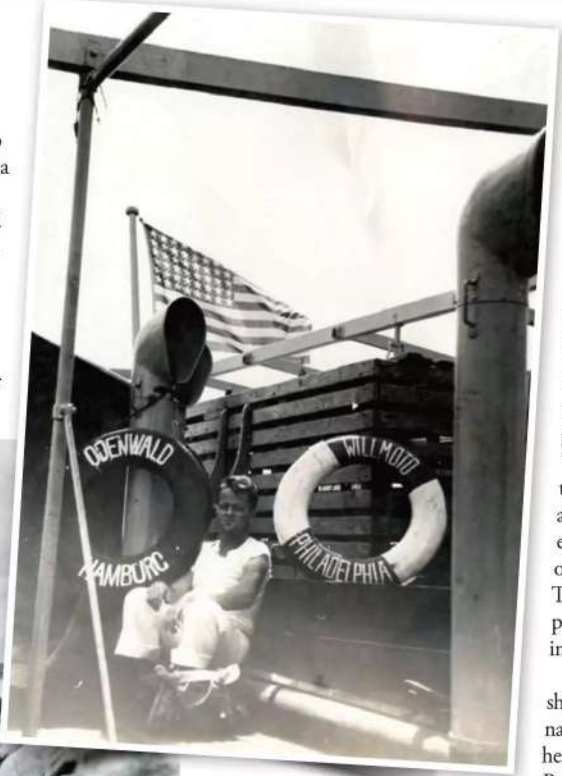
GERMAN BLOCKADE RUNNER SEIZED

Since the outbreak of war in 1939, the Royal Navy had maintained a total blockade of Germany's maritime lifelines – much in the same way that the Kriegsmarine had been trying to target the Merchant Navy. As part of their efforts to break the British blockade, the Germans employed a number of blockadebrecher, or blockade runners.

One of these was the SS *Odenwald*. Commanded by Captain Gerhart Loers, *Odenwald*, having sailed from Japan, was attempting to return to port, almost certainly Bordeaux, with a mixed cargo that amounted to some 6,223 tons. Included in its inventory were 3,857 tons of crude rubber, 545 tons of oats, 900 tons of peanuts, 50 tons of copper and even 102 truck tyres.



Members of USS *Omaha*'s boarding party set out towards the blockade runner *Odenwald*. (National Museum of the US Navy)



Pictured in the immediate aftermath of the blockade runner's seizure by USS *Omaha*, the Stars and Stripes flies from *Odenwald*. Note the life rings with the different names. (National Museum of the US Navy)

Early on the morning of November 4, 1941, the British oiler MV *Olwen* reported that it had been attacked by a German surface raider – though subsequent messages suggested that the shelling had in fact come from a surfaced U-boat. However, the oiler's signal instigated a prompt response from Allied warships in the area. Vice Admiral Algernon Willis RN, Commander-in-Chief South Atlantic, ordered the heavy cruiser HMS *Dorsetshire* and armed merchant cruiser HMS *Canton* to investigate, other vessels also being allocated to the task. This included two US Navy destroyers, USS *Omaha* and USS *Somers*, which had been on patrol to the north of *Olwen*'s stated position.

The hunt for the surface raider continued throughout the day and well on into the 5th, by when it was generally assumed that the enemy had slipped through the net. However, the search, as the US Navy's History and Heritage Command notes, "proved not entirely fruitless". Its account goes on to state the following: "*Omaha* and *Somers*, en route to Recife and returning from a 3,023-mile patrol in Atlantic equatorial waters, sighted smoke on the horizon at 0506. Capt. Theodore E. Chandler put *Omaha* on a course to intercept.

"As *Omaha* grew closer, the ship – flying U.S. colors and the name on her stern identifying her as *Willmoto* of Philadelphia, Pa. – began taking evasive action. Multiple attempts made to communicate with the steamer went either unanswered or were given suspicious responses."

Captain Chandler revealed what happened next in his post-action report: "The ship was directed by searchlight to make her international call, but no answer was made by light. Upon closing her, it was found that she was flying the United States flag, with United States painted on each side just below the bridge. From her signal halyard was flying 'KIGF', the international call of the U.S. merchantman *Willmoto*. On the stern was painted '*Willmoto*, Philadelphia'. The name *Willmoto* was also painted on the bow.

USS *Omaha*, on the right, closes in on the German blockade runner *Odenwald* on November 6, 1941. (USNHHC)

Crewmembers from USS *Omaha* pose with a German on board the captured German freighter *Odenwald* on 18 November 1941. (National Museum of the US Navy)

"Numerous attempts were made to get her to answer signals, but to no avail. A signal was then made 'Stop your engines and heave to'. Upon coming close aboard the Commanding Officer, by megaphone, asked, 'Why don't you answer signals'. There was no answer. The question was repeated. Still no answer."

A series of questions were then fired at the uncommunicative ship's crew. "Where are you from?", finally elicited a response, the answer being "Capetown". In reply to a query about the ship's destination came the information "New Orleans".

Throughout this tense stand-off, USS *Omaha* had continued circling around the merchant vessel. But, as Captain Chandler went on to point out, his suspicions were now fully aroused: "Noticing that some of her characteristics did not coincide with those of *Willmoto* in *Merchant Ships of the World, 1940*, and, also, that some of her personnel were distinctly un-American in appearance, [I] decided to send a boarding party to board her. At 0637… a boarding party in charge of Lieutenant George E. Carmichael, U.S. Navy, left the ship to board the vessel.

"Immediately after the boat was lowered into the water the [merchant] vessel hoisted 'Fox Mike', meaning: 'I am sinking. Send boat for passengers and crew.' At the same time, they began abandoning ship. This was the first positive assurance that something was wrong. At the same time some packages were thrown overboard, and [USS] *Somers* signalled that a large package had been thrown overboard from the bridge previous to our coming close aboard for hailing."

Lieutenant Carmichael and his men continued to make their way across to the merchant ship. His party included Signalman 1st Class Charles Jones: "When we arrived one boat was already in the water. We came alongside this boat. Lieutenant Carmichael asked them why they were leaving their ship. An officer who was later identified as the first officer replied that this was a German ship, and she was sinking. Lieutenant Carmichael immediately ordered them aboard and told them to stop the ship from sinking or they would go down with it."

Another member of Carmichael's small force was Aviation Chief Machinist's Mate Jesse Folly, who recalled the following: "Upon approaching the ship with the Boarding Party they were attempting to lower quickly two boats. They were throwing in their baggage and lowering themselves down the lines into the boat. Lieutenant Carmichael ordered all of that to cease; ordered the men back aboard ship. As Mr. Carmichael was climbing up the side there were two explosions deep in the after part of the ship."

Several of the sinking ship's crew had lowered lifeboats and were attempting to leave, but Carmichael ordered them back on board. The exact nature and purpose of the merchant vessel quickly became apparent and at 05.58 hours Carmichael signalled *Omaha* that the ship was indeed German and was sinking. She was the blockadebrecher *Odenwald*.

Members of the prize party from USS *Omaha* pose with American and German flags on *Oldenwald* following its seizure. (National Museum of the US Navy)

Omaha's sailors, joined by a diesel engine specialist from USS *Somers*, were able to prevent *Odenwald*'s loss in what has become known as "The *Odenwald* Incident". Escorted by *Omaha* and *Somers*, the freighter, even though no state of war then existed between the United States and Germany, was taken to port in Puerto Rico. For their part in its capture, each member of Lieutenant Carmichael's boarding party was given $3,000 bounty.

Some of *Odenwald*'s crew pictured under guard on USS *Omaha*. It is said that at least one of the men on the blockade runner had served on *Graf Spee* before its scuttling after the Battle of the River Plate in December 1939. (USNHHC)

This view of USS *Omaha* was taken from *Odenwald*'s bridge whilst the latter was being taken to Puerto Rico. After Germany declared war on the United States on December 11, 1941, *Odenwald* was seized and put into US service as SS *Blenheim*. (National Museum of the US Navy)

The name *Ark Royal*, originally carried by an English galleon fighting the Spanish Armada in 1588, has been associated with Royal Navy aircraft carriers since World War One.

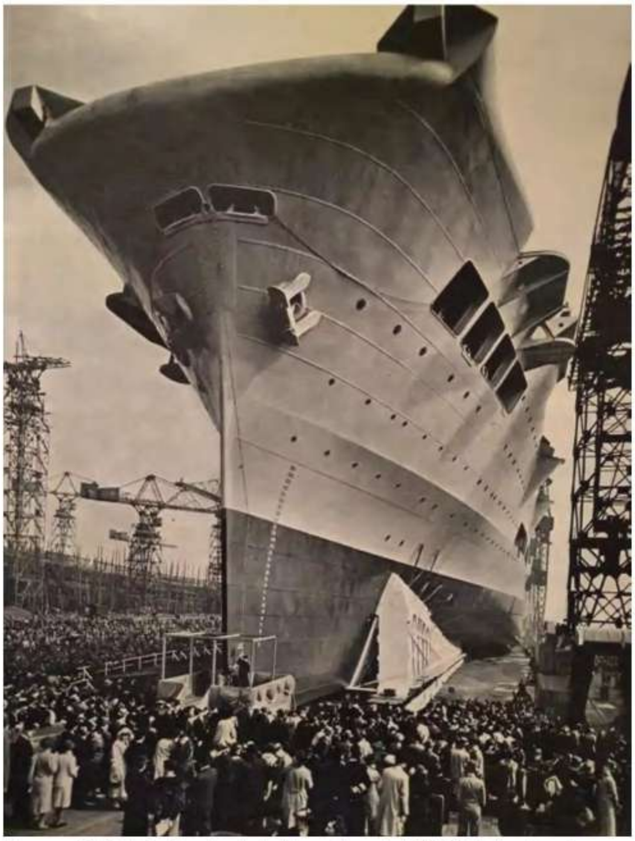
The second *Ark Royal* was a merchant ship converted on the building stocks to be a seaplane carrier during the Great War. It was a conversion that brought the Royal Navy only her second ever aircraft carrier. Launched in 1914, and having served in actions such as the Dardanelles Campaign, she was renamed HMS *Pegasus* in 1934. She continued in service until 1950 when she was broken up.

This new identity was needed so that the name *Ark Royal* would be available for a new ship. This new ship, the third in the line, would be Britain's first 'modern', purpose-built, aircraft carrier. Designed in 1934 to meet the limits of the Washington Naval Treaty, this new carrier was built by Cammell Laird at Birkenhead. Completed in November 1938, she was commissioned the following month.

HMS *Ark Royal*'s ground-breaking design incorporated many new features. It was, for example, the first occasion in which the flight deck was an integral part of the ship as opposed to an add-on or superstructure deck. But this carrier's most innovative feature was her strength. Her design introduced, for the first time, the concept of armoured flight and hangar decks.

Serving during the conflict that first saw the extensive use of naval air power, carrier tactics were often developed and refined using *Ark Royal*. Due to her involvement in such actions as the Norwegian campaign, the hunt for *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau,* and the sinking of the German battleship *Bismarck*, she became one of the most famous ships of the Royal Navy. But it was her participation in the Malta convoys that would ensure that her illustrious career was short-lived.

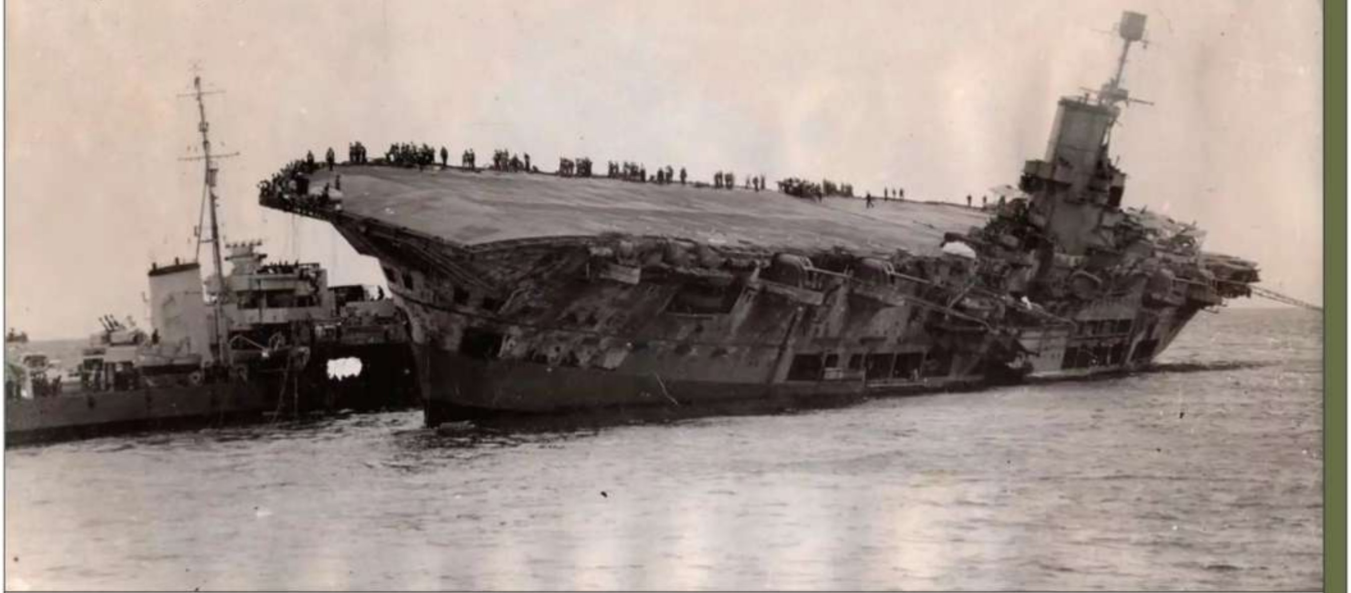
On November 10, 1941, *Ark Royal* ferried aircraft to Malta before heading to Gibraltar. On November 13, *Ark Royal* operated her aircraft for the last time. That afternoon, the 'Ark' was steering towards Gibraltar with the battleship HMS *Malaya*, the carrier HMS *Argus*, the cruiser HMS *Hermione* and seven destroyers. In fine weather, at 15.25 hours 12 aircraft were flown off for training, while a further 14 were waiting to be landed.

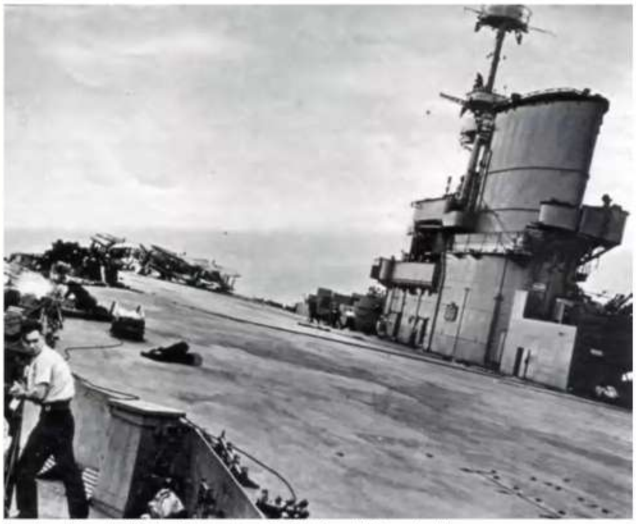


The moment that *Ark Royal* was launched at Merseyside on April 13, 1937. Her huge bows tower up to the flight deck, which is, in turn, 800 feet long and 94 feet wide. The carrier took three years and three months to build and cost £2,330,000.

HMS ARK ROYAL TORPEDOED

The L-class destroyer HMS *Legion* at work during its rescue attempts as *Ark Royal*'s crew line the edge of the flight deck after being torpedoed by *U-81*. (All images Historic Military Press)





The almost deserted flight deck is pictured as *Ark Royal*'s list gradually increases.

With no indication of what was about to happen, the minutes ticked by, the crew busy with the arriving and departing aircraft. At 15.40 hours, the sonar operator aboard one of the escorts, the destroyer HMS *Legion*, detected an unidentified sound, but assumed it had been caused by the propellers of another destroyer. Sixty seconds later, with the 'Ark' just 30 miles from Gibraltar and within sight of the Rock, and as the last of the returning Swordfish about to land, there was a loud explosion on the starboard side, between the fuel bunkers and bomb store, directly below the bridge island.

Commanded by Oberleutnant zur See Friedrich Guggenberger, the Type VIIC U-boat *U-81* had been en route from Brest to La Spezia in Italy when she encountered the inbound ships of Force H. A single torpedo struck the carrier on the starboard side, abreast of the island. The explosion tore open a hole 130 feet long by thirty feet deep – the damage being exacerbated by the time it took to bring the ship to a halt, during which further pieces of hull plating were peeled off.

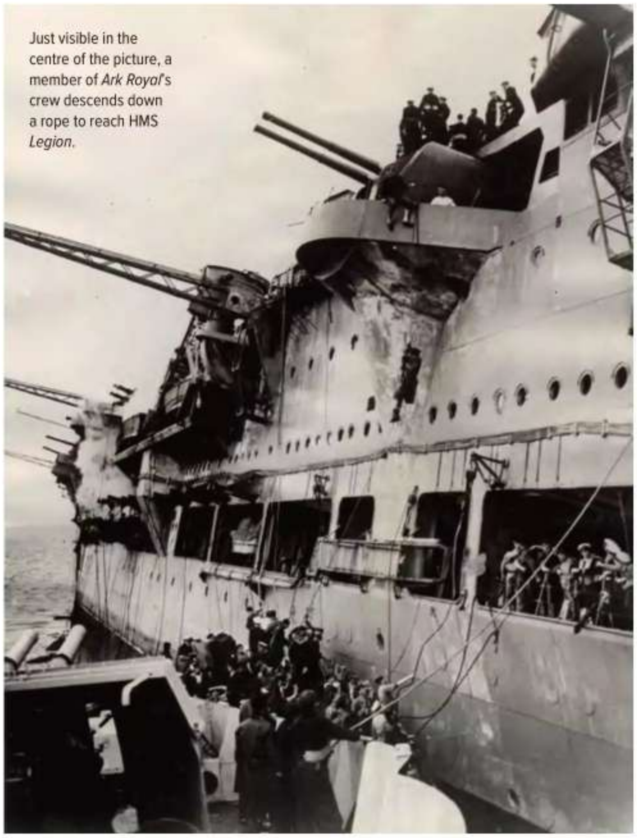
Below deck, the carrier was plunged into darkness. The carrier whipped so violently that five aircraft were flung into the air no less than three times. One of the Swordfish pilots who had just landed was Lieutenant Philip David 'Percy' Gick of 825 NAS. "I had landed on first," he recalled, "and went up to the bridge. [I] was actually on the bridge reporting when the last aircraft came on; a man called Burgh [*sic*] did an absolute perfect landing and at that moment the torpedo hit… Literally as he touched down, the bloody torpedo hit, [and the] whole ship shook, clouds of smoke everywhere."

Gradually, the carrier began to flood. She took on a list which progressively increased. The list reached 20 degrees some 11 hours and four minutes after the torpedo hit. The angle touched 27 degrees an hour and a quarter later. At this point, the order to abandon ship was again given. All crew were off the ship by 04.30 hours – 12 hours and 19 minutes after the hit. At this time the list had reached 35 degrees.

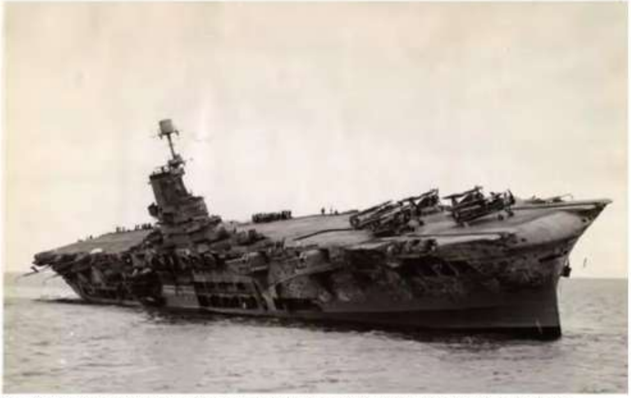
The last eyewitnesses on the scene reported that HMS *Ark Royal* finally rolled on to her beam ends, paused for about three minutes, before turning right over. She then appeared to break in two, with the aft section sinking first, followed by the bow, all in the space of a couple of minutes. All but one of the crew survived the torpedoing and sinking.

One press report subsequently states: "The sinking of HMS *Ark Royal* brings to an end a story of the seas, of brilliant achievement under the most rigorous wartime conditions. Where action was brewing, there was to be found the *Ark Royal* playing her part in many theatres of war, from the northern seas to the South Atlantic, in the Mediterranean and elsewhere, seeking out the enemy.

"Axis propaganda sunk the ship in broadcasts and the Nazi airman alleged to have sunk the aircraft carrier was decorated and feted in Germany. The *Ark Royal* lived to tell another story, and continued to add to her fame and contribution to naval history. The passing of the *Ark Royal*, as she was 'going about her business', was in keeping with her high traditions. A 'happy' ship from the beginning to the end she will be mourned but will be remembered as 'The Ark'. Her story will be treasured in the annals of British history."



Just visible in the centre of the picture, a member of *Ark Royal*'s crew descends down a rope to reach HMS *Legion*.



The stricken HMS *Ark Royal* photographed, with a heavy list, from HMS *Hermione*. Note the Swordfish that can still be seen on the flight deck.

The exact location of *Ark Royal* wreck was unknown until mid-December 2002, when the carrier's wreck was discovered 30 nautical miles from Gibraltar. It was lying at a depth of some 1,000 metres.

THE FIRST SAS RAID

On the night of November 16, 1941, five Bristol Bombay aircraft of 216 Squadron took-off from Fuka aerodrome in Cyrenaica. On board were 65 members of the recently-formed SAS who were tasked with undertaking the formation's first ever mission.

Codenamed Operation *Squatter*, the SAS troopers were tasked with attacking Axis landing grounds at Tmimi and Gazala on the Mediterranean coast to the west of Tobruk. With the men being parachuted behind enemy lines, the operation was made in support of the Eighth Army's attempt to relieve Tobruk which was planned to begin on the morning of November 18, 1941. After the completion of the mission the men would be recovered and brought back to the British lines by the Long Range Desert Group (LRDG).

As the transport aircraft flew out over the sea, conditions began to deteriorate rapidly. Wind and rain buffeted the aircraft and soon they were blown far off course; the crews had no real idea where they were. The situation deteriorated even further when one of the Bombays was shot down and all 15 parachutists and crew were lost.

Those parachutists who eventually jumped from the remaining aircraft were widely dispersed by the strong wind, as were their weapons and equipment. Private Bob Bennett's recollections of the raid typify the conditions the men had to endure: "On hitting the ground I immediately found myself being dragged by the wind. I could not stop myself, but made desperate efforts to release my harness, this being a job for Houdini. I don't know how far I was dragged, but after being used as a human bulldozer for what seemed an age, a lull in the fury of the gale allowed my 'chute to collapse. Purely by instinct and training I managed to get out of my harness and roll up the 'chute and bury it."

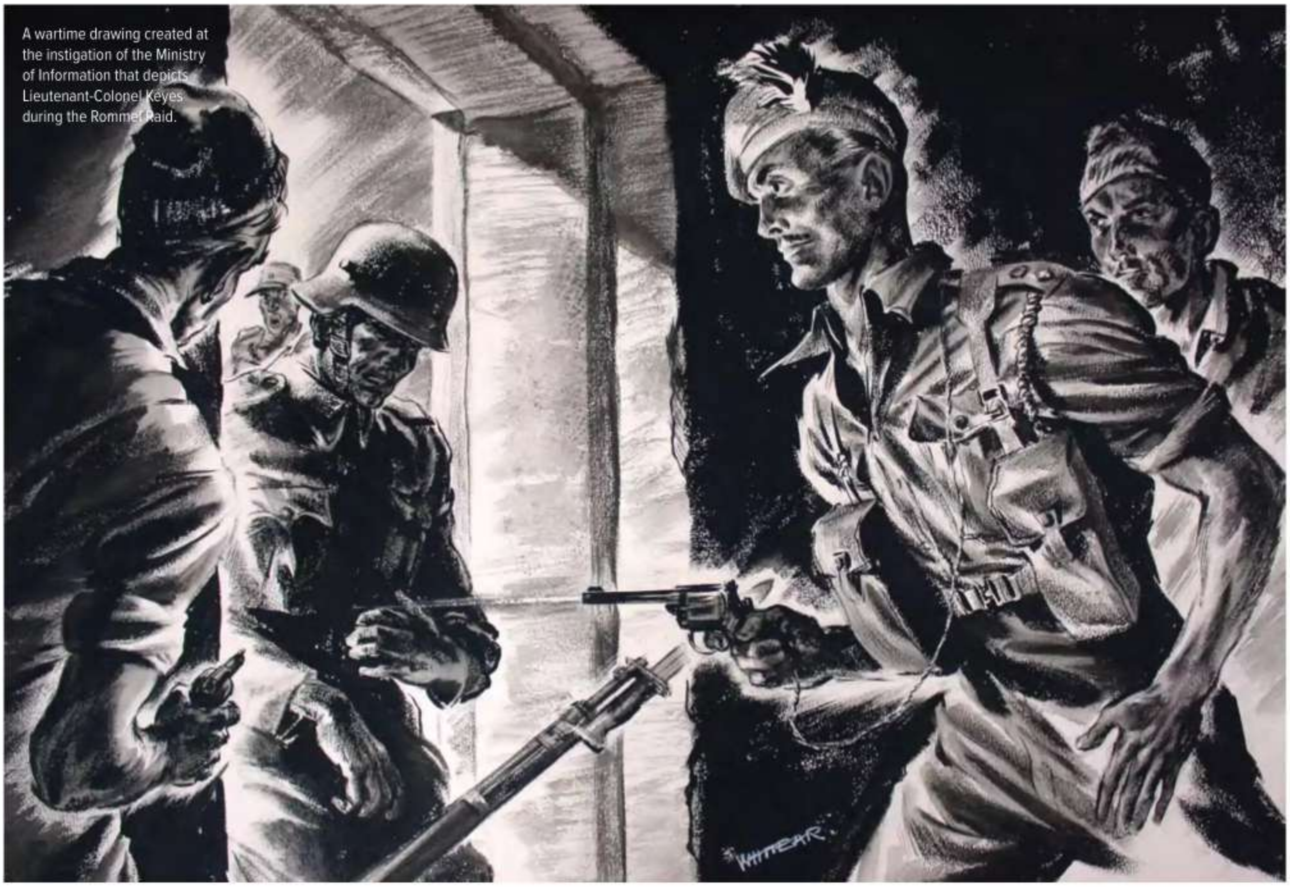
Having regrouped with other members of the SAS team, it soon became apparent that the chance of seeing the mission through to a successful conclusion had already been lost. After seeking shelter through the night, Bennett's group set off on a 36-hour march to reach the spot where it had been pre-agreed that they would be picked by an LRDG patrol.

Formed in July 1941, this image shows early members of the SAS undergoing training at Kabrit, Eqypt, that year.

The raid was a complete disaster. Not a single enemy aircraft was destroyed and of the five officers and 60 men who had set off on the mission only 22 made it back. The great experiment had failed.

Using parachuting as a means of entry had been important in selling the concept of the SAS to the generals in the desert, hence the title Special Air Service, but in the course of Operation *Squatter* it had proved ineffective. Dropping the men by parachute may have failed, but if the LRDG had been able to extract men from behind enemy lines, why could it not infiltrate as well as extract the SAS teams? Thanks to the events of November 16, 1941, and the hours that followed, the SAS found its true rationale.

A patrol of the Long Range Desert Group – similar to that which rescued survivors of Operation *Squatter*. (via Historic Military Press)



A wartime drawing created at the instigation of the Ministry of Information that depicts Lieutenant-Colonel Keyes during the Rommel Raid.

THE ROMMEL RAID

With the Allies in North Africa about to launch a new offensive against Axis forces, a plan was devised to target the latter's commander – Generalleutnant Erwin Rommel – and his communication systems. Codenamed Operation *Flipper*, the task of executing the attack was handed to the Commandoes, mainly the men of No.11 (Scottish) Commando, who were, in turn, supported by the Special Boat Section.

One of the raiders was Lieutenant-Colonel Geoffrey Charles Tasker Keyes, MC. What followed was summarised in the subsequent citation for the award of the Victoria Cross to Keyes – the first to a Commando. The announcement was published in *The London Gazette* on June 19, 1942:

"Lieutenant-Colonel Keyes commanded a detachment of a force which landed some 250 miles behind the enemy lines… From the outset Lieutenant-Colonel Keyes deliberately selected for himself the command of the detachment detailed to attack what was undoubtedly the most hazardous of these objectives –the residence and Headquarters [at Sidi-Rafa] of the General Officer Commanding the German forces in North Africa. This attack, even if initially successful, meant almost certain death for those who took part in it.

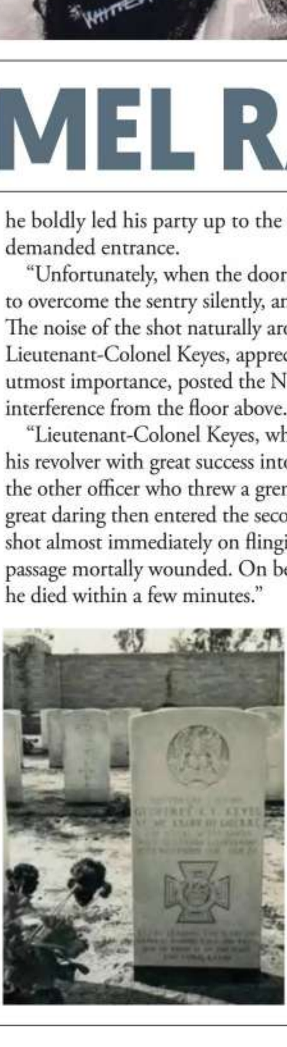
"He led his detachment without guides, in dangerous and precipitous country and in pitch darkness, and maintained, by his stolid determination and powers of leadership, the morale of the detachment. He then found himself forced to modify his original plans in the light of fresh information elicited from neighbouring Arabs, and was left with only one officer and an N.C.O. with whom to break into General Rommel's residence and deal with the guards and Headquarters Staff.

"At zero hour on the night of 17th–18th November, 1941, having despatched the covering party to block the approaches to the house, he himself with the two others crawled forward past the guards, through the surrounding fence and so up to the house itself. Without hesitation, he boldly led his party up to the front door, beat on the door and demanded entrance.

"Unfortunately, when the door was opened, it was found impossible to overcome the sentry silently, and it was necessary to shoot him. The noise of the shot naturally aroused the inmates of the house and Lieutenant-Colonel Keyes, appreciating that speed was now of the utmost importance, posted the N.C.O. at the foot of the stairs to prevent interference from the floor above.

"Lieutenant-Colonel Keyes, who instinctively took the lead, emptied his revolver with great success into the first room and was followed by the other officer who threw a grenade. Lieutenant-Colonel Keyes with great daring then entered the second room on the ground floor but was shot almost immediately on flinging open the door and fell back into the passage mortally wounded. On being carried outside by his companions he died within a few minutes."

Of the raiders, two were killed, while a further 28 were captured (of whom three were wounded) and three men escaped; German casualties were four killed and three wounded. Rommel had not been at the building that night.



On Rommel's instructions, Keyes was buried with full military honours, the ceremony conducted by the German commander's personal chaplain. This picture of Keyes' grave in Benghazi War Cemetery was taken by William Fisher in the late 1950s or early 1960s when the latter was posted to North Africa whilst working for Esso. (James Luto Collection)

OPERATION CRUSADER

With the Allies stung by the failure of Operation *Battleaxe*, following the removal of his predecessor it fell to General Auchinleck to try and find a way to lift the siege of Tobruk. "In November," he subsequently wrote, "there were sufficient troops already in the Middle East and enough reinforcements promised, to allow me to conduct an offensive in the west. The scope of the proposed offensive was ambitious, but it could be contemplated without running undue risks elsewhere, provided that the destruction of most of the enemy forces was effected in Eastern Cyrenaica. Above all, it was essential that there should be no delay."

Codenamed *Crusader*, Auchinleck's new offensive in the Western Desert was launched on November 18, 1941. In support of this third attempt to break through to Tobruk, the British and Commonwealth air forces could muster 16 squadrons of fighters (Hawker Hurricanes, Curtiss Tomahawks and Bristol Beaufighters), eight squadrons of bombers (Bristol Blenheims and Martin Marylands) and three tactical reconnaissance squadrons (Hurricanes and Douglas Bostons). The RAF, for its part, was able to establish a measure of air superiority in the early stages of *Crusader*.

Similar results were less easy to come by on the ground. As they advanced, Auchinleck's armoured units suffered heavily at the hands of the Afrika Korps – up to November 22, for example, they lost some 530 tanks. Rommel, meanwhile, lost about 100 in the same period. on On November 23, the 5th South African Brigade was ravaged at Sidi Rezegh, but still inflicted further heavy casualties on German tank units in the process.

Undeterred, on November 24 Rommel ordered a "dash to the wire". This caused a degree of chaos to break out in the British rear echelons, but the Allies somehow managed to regain control and the battle raged on. By the beginning of December, the grinding attrition of the fighting meant that the Axis forces had less than 60 tanks left in action. This, and the prospect of a freshly reinforced British armoured force moving forward to cut off his withdrawal route, led Rommel to order his men to begin pulling back to El Agheila on December 4.

Allied officers undergoing a military map-reading exercise in the Western Desert before the opening of Operation *Crusader* on November 18, 1941. (Historic Military Press)

In so doing, the Afrika Korps abandoned the battlefield to the battered Eighth Army. Recently formed, the latter made its debut in the North African campaign when it crossed the Egyptian frontier into Libya as *Crusader* got underway.

By December 10, Rommel, facing the inevitable, pulled out the last of his units from their positions overlooking Tobruk. At long last the siege had been lifted.

"The offensive was a success," concluded Auchinleck, "but rather slower, more costly, and less complete than I had hoped. Nevertheless, of the enemy forces in Cyrenaica over two-thirds were destroyed.".

The Axis forces effected their retreat to the west in good order, the rear-guards inflicting heavy casualties on their pursuers. Rommel, though, was far from beaten. He would use the weeks that followed to reprovision and reinforce his units, returning to the offensive early in 1942.

Afrika Korps prisoners being escorted into Tobruk after the siege was lifted in December 1941. (Historic Military Press)

A CATACLYSMIC EXPLOSION

For the Royal Navy, the losses kept on mounting as 1941 progressed. Hot on the heels of the sinking of HMS *Ark Royal*, it was in the Mediterranean that again was the scene of another devastating U-boat attack.

On the afternoon of November 24, the 1st Battle Squadron, comprising *Barham*, *Queen Elizabeth*, and *Valiant*, with an escort of eight destroyers, departed Alexandria to participate in the hunt for Italian convoys reported in the area. The following morning, the crew of the Type VIIC U-boat *U-331*, commanded by Oberleutnant zur See Hans-Diedrich Freiherr von Tiesenhausen, detected the sound of approaching warships. Closing in, von Tiesenhausen ordered that all four bow torpedoes be fired from a range of only 750 yards at 16.25 hours.

HMS *Barham* had no time for evasive action. The torpedoes stuck so closely together that they threw up a single, massive, water column. As she rolled over to port, her magazines exploded, and the ship quickly sank.

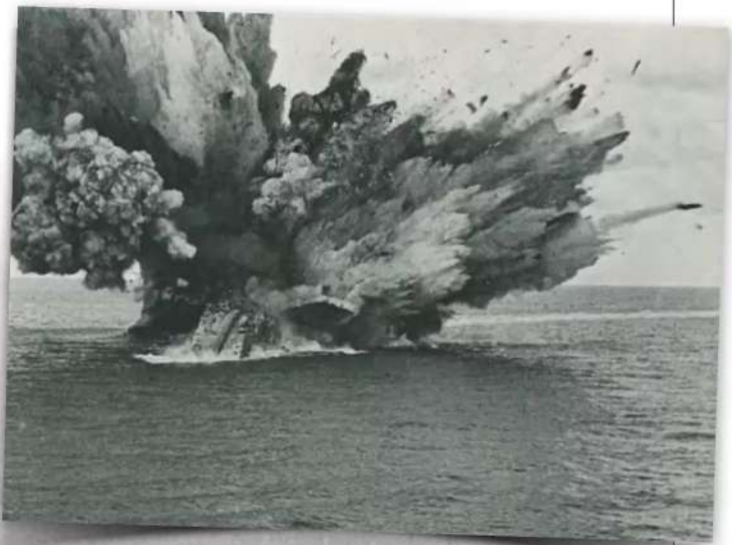
Richard Laland was one of the battleship's crew that day. Speaking to the *Leicester Mercury* on November 9, 2013, he recalled the following: "We were standing by a ladder two decks below on the mess deck when there was a huge explosion. It was by an air vent from the engine room that was hit, and all this smoke came pouring up. We looked at each other and said, 'Right, let's get up top!'

"By the time we got on deck, the ship was listing at a 45-degree angle. We climbed over the guard rail and started running down the side of the ship. When we reached one of the torpedo bulges, my friend jumped into the water. I dived in headfirst, but as I did, the ship rolled again and I smashed my head on the hull and was knocked unconscious."

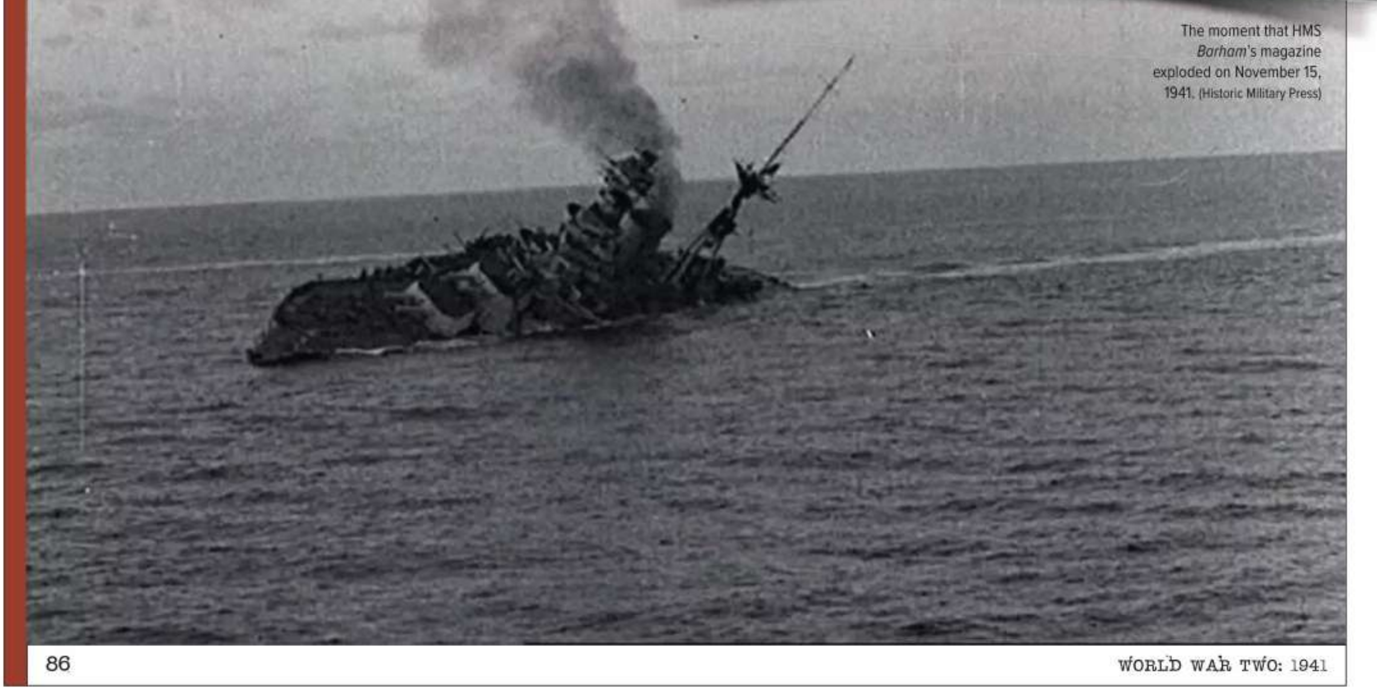
When Laland recovered his senses, he realised that he was underwater. "I was disorientated but reached out and felt the ship," he continued. "I was trying to push myself away when I got blown away by this massive explosion as the magazine went up." The blast propelled Laland to the surface, where, clinging to a piece of wreckage, he was eventually picked up by an Australian destroyer.

Serving on HMS *Queen Elizabeth*, Roland Bundy witnessed the cataclysmic explosion that tore HMS *Barham* apart: "Suddenly there was a blinding flash, an enormous explosion and a mushroom of black smoke rose thousands of feet into the air. Debris was hurled into the air, and I saw one of the 15-inch gun turrets lifted up hundreds of feet."

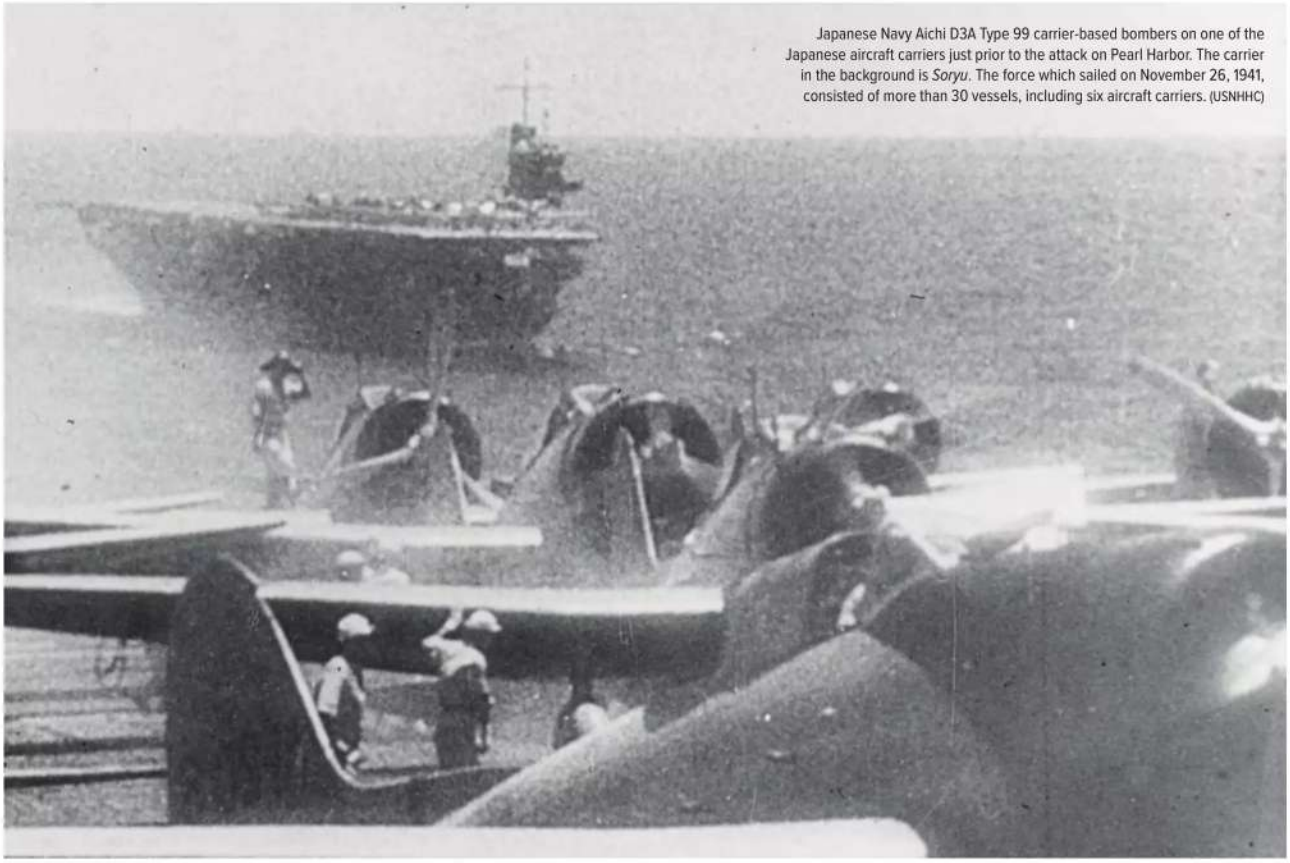
Taking the opportunity to mislead the Germans, and protect British morale, the Admiralty withheld all news of *Barham*'s sinking and the loss of the 861 British seamen – though the next of kin were informed several weeks later. It was not until January 27, 1942, that the Admiralty finally issued a public statement on the loss.



The moment that HMS *Barham*'s magazine exploded on November 15, 1941. (Historic Military Press)



The battleship HMS *Barham* listing heavily in the immediate aftermath of the torpedo strikes from *U-331*. (WENN)



Japanese Navy Aichi D3A Type 99 carrier-based bombers on one of the Japanese aircraft carriers just prior to the attack on Pearl Harbor. The carrier in the background is *Soryu*. The force which sailed on November 26, 1941, consisted of more than 30 vessels, including six aircraft carriers. (USNHHC)

THE JAPANESE FLEET SAILS

Though tensions in the Pacific region, particularly between the United States and Japan, had been building for some time, radicals in the Japanese government had been inspired by the success of Hitler's forces in Europe. To these individuals, the opportunity to launch their own attack on European colonies in Asia had arrived. Such sentiments were reinforced when the Japanese Government formed an alliance with the Third Reich and Italy, signing the Tripartite Pact on September 27, 1940.

The next expansionist Japanese moves followed at the same time with the occupation of French Indochina – Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos – after an agreement had been secured with the Vichy Government. The United States responded to this growing threat by temporarily halting negotiations with Japanese diplomats, instituting a full embargo. Over the next two days Britain and the Dutch Government in exile followed suit. The Japanese viewed these actions as an attempt "to deny Japan her rightful place in the world by destroying her only available means of self-existence and self-defence".

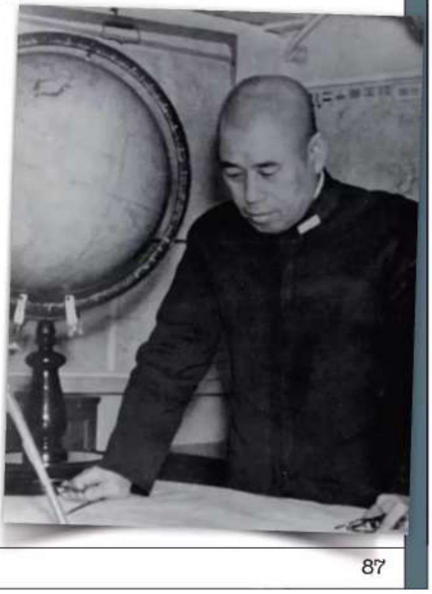
Faced with serious shortages as the embargo began to bite, the Japanese had to act quickly. Either they had to withdraw and lose much of what they had gained, or secure the resources, particularly oil, they needed by neutralising the USA and sweeping into South-East Asia. The longer they waited, the weaker they would become.

Prime Minister Hideki Tojo persuaded Emperor Hirohito and key members of his government that if the ongoing negotiations with the US failed to see the lifting of the embargo, then Japan must strike at the United States. For this to be possible, the strike against America, and at the same time British possessions in the region, must be so powerful and effective, that it would take many months before the Western powers could retaliate, by which time Japan's position would have become so strong that Britain and the USA would baulk at trying to challenge her. A negotiated peace could then be agreed, and Japan would become one of the most powerful nations on the planet. But the success of these plans depended on one thing – destroying the US Navy's Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor.

As early as April 1941, the Imperial Japanese Navy's First Air Fleet had been created and expressly tasked with the attack on the US Pacific Fleet. Shortly after its formation, its Chief of Staff was handed a document entitled *Pearl Harbor Attack Plan*. Vice Admiral Ryunosuke Kusaka was instructed by Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto to turn the plan into reality. The two key elements to success were surprise and the deployment of overwhelming strength.

In September 1941, a "map manoeuvre" exercise was held in the Naval Staff College in Tokyo to study the operational plan. It validated Yamamoto's scheme.

Finally, on November 26, 1941, the Japanese First Air Fleet set sail from the Kurile Islands. With orders to strike against the US Navy at Pearl Harbor, World War Two was about to become a truly global conflict.



Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, the man who led the Japanese planning for the attack on Pearl Harbor, taken during the early 1940s, when he was the Commander in Chief of the Imperial Japanese Navy's Combined Fleet. (USNHHC)

MALTA'S 1,000TH AIR RAID ALERT

Thousands of tons of bombs were dropped indiscriminately on both military targets and civilian locations across Malta as the siege of the Mediterranean island continued unabated for month after month. Food, fuel and ammunition were running desperately short. Most shops were closed, either because they had been bombed or because they had nothing to sell. Sirens, bombing and the chatter of AA guns had become the pattern of everyday life.

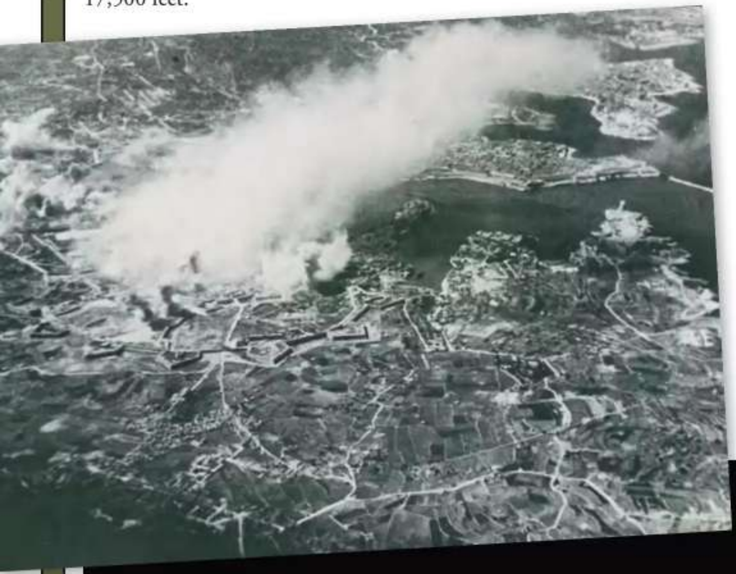
For the long-suffering Maltese, the morning of December 1, 1941, saw a grim milestone reached in their existence under siege – the 1,000th air raid alert on the island since the very first attack back in June 1940. It was at 08.32 hours that the sirens began sounding, once again sending people running for their shelters. At that point a pair of Italian Aeronautica Macchi C.202 Folgore fighters, operating in the reconnaissance role, raced across the island fortress at an altitude of 17,500 feet.

Accepted as the best fighter airplane fielded in significant numbers by the Regia Aeronautica during World War Two, the pair's appearance and departure was so fast that no defending aircraft was able to intercept. At the same time, no bombs were dropped, so no damage or casualties were reported. There were at least three more air raid alerts that day – though no actual attacks were made on these occasions either.

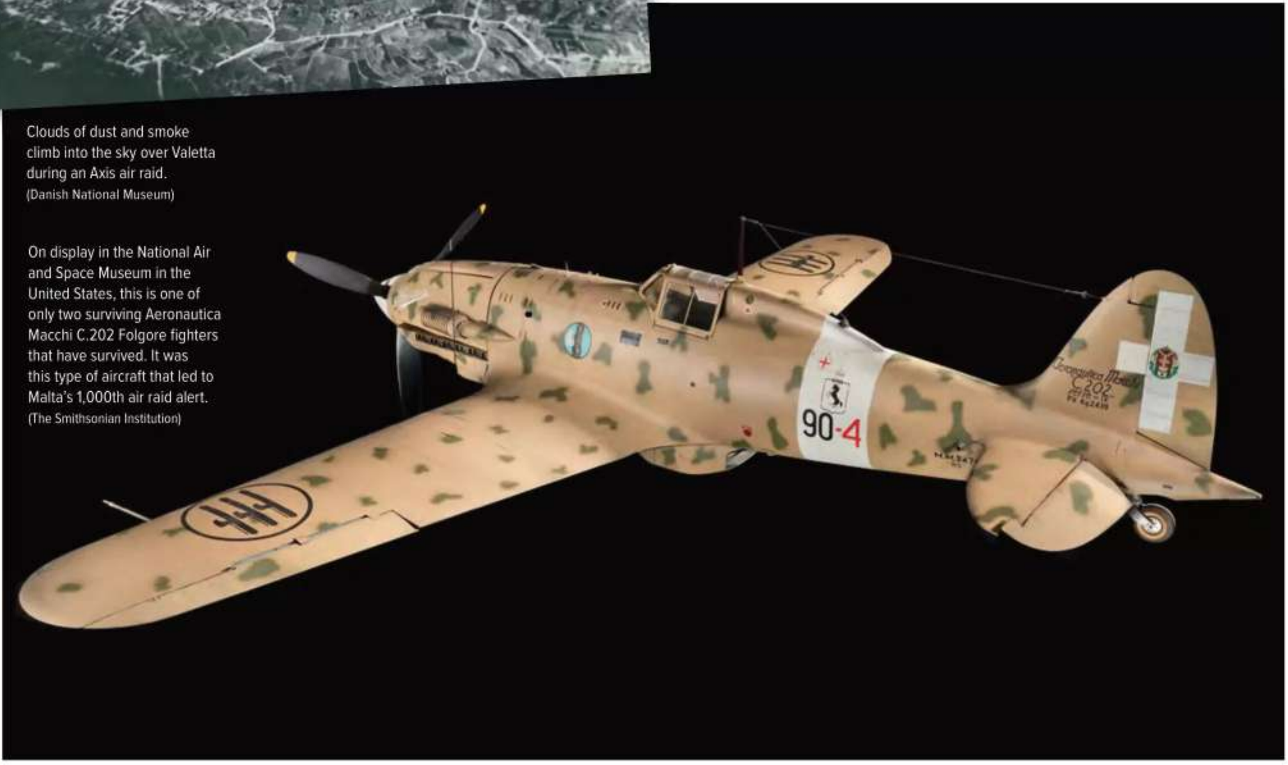
The effects of the first year-and-a-half of bombing on Malta were witnessed by Viscount Cranborne, the then Secretary of State for the Colonies, when he made a special visit to the island in 1942. In a broadcast he made at the time, he declared: "No one who has visited the island, who has seen what I have already seen, could fail to realise how cruel is the ordeal through which you have passed and are passing. Your cities and towns have been ravaged by bombing; your ancient and beautiful churches and monuments of long and honourable history have been wrecked and blasted; your homes have been reduced to heaps of broken stones.

"You have endured all that the malice of the enemy could do against you, and you have emerged triumphant, and will, I am confident, continue to do so… After two years of siege and bombardment almost unrivalled in history, the defences of Malta remain unbroken and you still carry on your daily life, serene and undismayed."

That Malta had not succumbed to the so-far chiefly Italian siege would have been of great concern to many Axis leaders. Indeed, General Rommel had himself remarked in May 1941, that, "Without Malta the Axis will end by losing control of North Africa". It was against this backdrop that, following a meeting between Göring and his Italian counterpart, the Luftwaffe once again returned to the skies over the island on December 16, 1941. The siege had many months – certainly more than a year – left to run its course. Not for nothing is Malta often referred to as one of the most bombed places on earth.



Clouds of dust and smoke climb into the sky over Valetta during an Axis air raid. (Danish National Museum)



On display in the National Air and Space Museum in the United States, this is one of only two surviving Aeronautica Macchi C.202 Folgore fighters that have survived. It was this type of aircraft that led to Malta's 1,000th air raid alert. (The Smithsonian Institution)

Fresh Russian reinforcements make their way through Moscow's streets on their way to the front, 1 December 1941. (RIA Novosti Archive, #429/Oleg Ignatovich/CC-BY-SA 3.0)

MOSCOW IS SAVED

General Zhukov was only too aware of the importance of Moscow. When Napoleon had entered Moscow in 1812, St Petersburg was the capital of the Russian Empire but, since the Revolution, the Soviet capital had been Moscow and it could never be allowed to fall into enemy hands. As the panzers neared Moscow, Zhukov sought to delay them long enough for him to be able to bring forward the Red Army's reserves. He would use every man and woman he could find to defend the capital.

As Zhukov massed his reserves in and around Moscow, the scale of his achievements became apparent. In November Stalin could claim that, "as a result of four months of war, Germany, whose reserves of manpower are already being exhausted, has been considerably more weakened than the Soviet Union, whose reserves are only now being mobilised to the full".

At 03.00 hours on December 5, Zhukov made his move. The Soviet 31st Army attacked the German forces south of Kalinin, to the north of Moscow, while the 29th Army struck to the north of Kalinin. With temperatures around Moscow as low as -30 degrees, and with a metre of snow lying on the ground, the Red Army penetrated deep into Army Group Centre's territory. Reluctantly Hitler agreed to the temporary suspension of *Typhoon*. He justified this setback in his own mind by blaming it on the unusually early onset of winter.

Von Bock was told to hold his positions and halt the Soviet assault. But such was the strength of the Soviet attacks, the Germans were forced back on many fronts, as Zhukov launched his offensive against the German forces to the south of Moscow.

"We underestimated the strength of the enemy, and his ability to recover after suffering losses that would have toppled almost any other nation," conceded von Bock in his diary on December 8. "My soldiers have given all they have; they can do no more." That same day, General Gotthard Heinrici wrote to his wife: "The war is asking too much of us and of the whole German people. Our men have been fighting the enemy in the freezing cold for weeks, with thirty or more of them crammed together at night in a filthy peasant hut, without even any soap, with wounds that are festering and not properly bandaged up, tormented by constant itching of lice that infest their dirty uniforms."

Mirroring the views of von Bock, General Heinz Guderian wrote in his diary that, "The offensive on Moscow failed... We underestimated the enemy's strength, as well as his size and climate. Fortunately, I stopped my troops on 5 December, otherwise the catastrophe would be unavoidable."

Moscow had been saved. Never again would it be directly threatened by Hitler's forces. The events in front of the Soviet capital in December 1941 marked a turning point in the fighting on the Eastern Front, if not of World War Two as a whole.

The man who helped save Moscow, General Georgy Zhukov, speaking on September 1, 1941. A few weeks later, on October 10, 1941, the Reserve Front forces were merged with the Western Front under Zhukov's command. It was the Western Front that went on to participate in the defence of Moscow. (RIA Novosti Archive, #2410/P. Bernstein/CC-BY-SA 3.0)

FIRST SHOTS OF THE PACIFIC WAR

That something was afoot in the Pacific was becoming abundantly clear by the beginning of December 1941. By this stage, intelligence reports were already beginning to flow into the RAF's Far East Command, which was based in Singapore, detailing Japanese shipping and aircraft movements in the South China Sea.

Soon after midday on Saturday, December 6, a Lockheed Hudson from 1 Squadron RAAF, operating from the RAF airbase at Kota Bharu in north-eastern Malaya, sighted a large Japanese naval force heading west in a position some 80 miles south-west of Cape Cambodia. The crew of the Hudson, part of a three aircraft patrol and piloted by Flight Lieutenant Jack C Ramshaw, reported spotting at least one battleship, five cruisers, seven destroyers and 22 transports. The vital news of this development was radioed back to base by Ramshaw's wireless operator, Sergeant L C Kennedy.

Soon afterwards, another Hudson crew spotted a second fleet of comparable size. Despite their best efforts, the 1 Squadron aircraft, supported by those from 8 Squadron, were forced to abandon their attempts to continue shadowing the Japanese vessels as monsoonal rain then hid them from view. The British commanders and staff in the Combined Operations Room at Singapore could only guess as to their destination.

Then at around first light on December 7, 1941, as the Japanese invasion force continued its passage through the Gulf of Siam, en route to Malaya, a number of Aichi E13A "Jake" reconnaissance floatplanes were catapulted into the air, almost certainly from the seaplane tender *Kamikawa Maru*. One of those aircraft, that flown by Ensign Eiichi Ogata, soon encountered an RAF Catalina flying boat which was shadowing the enemy ships.

With the serial number W8417 and coded FV-W, this 205 Squadron Catalina, piloted by Flying Officer Patrick Edwin Bedell, had taken off from RAF Seletar, in Singapore, at 02.00 hours to undertake a local reconnaissance patrol. Bedell's crew relieved Catalina FV-S which returned safely to its base at 07.30 hours.

RAF Catalina flying boats at the flying boat base at RAF Seletar during 1941-2. (Library of Congress)

Ogata manoeuvred his aircraft into a position from which he was able to open fire on the Catalina. Bedell, however, managed to evade Ogata, who, in turn, continued to monitor the Catalina.

Some 20 minutes later, a patrol of Japanese Army Ki-27s arrived on the scene and promptly launched their own attack on the flying boat. After several passes by the fighters, the Catalina exploded and fell into the sea. All eight men on board were killed. They were the first Allied casualties of the War in the Pacific – the first shots of which had just been fired, but not at Pearl Harbor.

Despite the mounting evidence of an imminent seaborne invasion, the British high command in Singapore vacillated. The Commander-in-Chief, Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, declined to implement Operation *Matador*, the existing defence plan for Malaya, and initiate any pre-emptive strike against the Japanese force. Within hours, Emperor Hirohito's men made their next move, bringing their nation into the war.

Lockheed Hudsons of 8 Squadron RAAF in formation over Malaya during 1941-2. (Library of Congress)

Sailors in a motor launch rescue a survivor from the water alongside USS *West Virginia*, sunk at its mooring at Battleship Row having been hit by two bombs and seven torpedoes during the Japanese attack. USS *Tennessee* is inboard of the sunken battleship. (USNHHC)

CARNAGE AT BATTLESHIP ROW

The Japanese believed that battleships were still the most potent naval weapons. So, if the US Navy's Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor was to be neutralised, its battleships had to be sunk.

It was a Sunday morning. Many of the men were finishing a leisurely breakfast when, at 07.48 hours, the Japanese struck, and the bombs started to fall. Ensign Guy Fanningan could not believe what was happening: "Everyone thought it was a joke to have an air raid on Sunday. Then I heard an explosion."

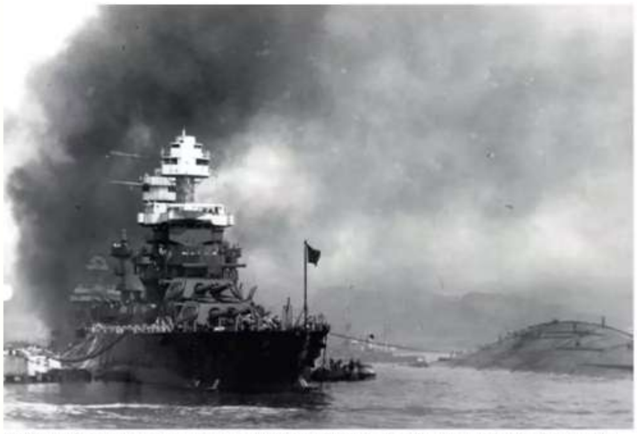
Everest Capra, of the Medical Administrative Corps, had enjoyed a game of tennis, as was his routine on a Sunday morning, before sitting down for breakfast. As he was throwing the eggshells away, he saw aircraft approaching unusually low in the sky. "It was of no surprise when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on Dec 7, 1941," he later recalled. "Most of us had been expecting this, but did not have the actual date. Then I noticed the red ball, and I knew right that minute that it was the day. Only wearing tennis shorts and sneakers, I ran about the buildings screaming, 'They are here!' and then all hell started to break loose."

Though the US Pacific Fleet was America's most powerful military weapon, and the bulwark of its West Coast defences, no one seemed to know what to do in the face of an attack. "We stood around awaiting orders of some kind," remembered Marine Corporal E C Nightingale aboard USS *Arizona*, one of eight battleships moored in Pearl Harbor's Battleship Row. "General Quarters sounded, and I started for my battle station in secondary aft… I was about three quarters of the way to the first platform on the mast when it seemed as though a bomb struck our quarterdeck. I could hear shrapnel or fragments whistling past me."

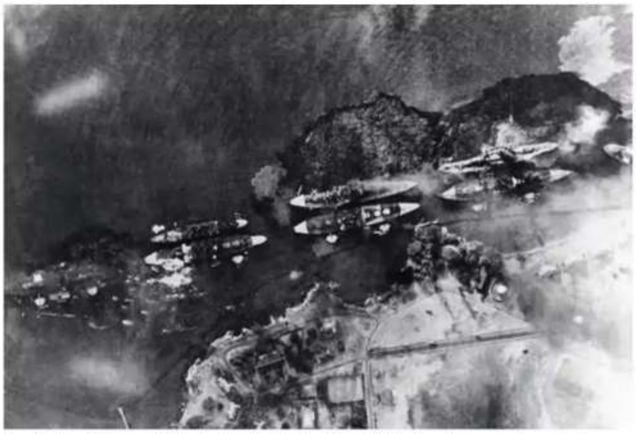
The first wave of Japanese aircraft, some 183 dive bombers, torpedo bombers and fighters, raced low over the harbour completely unchallenged. As fears of war with Japan had been intensifying in recent weeks, orders had been issued to man every fourth gun on each ship, but no one really expected the Japanese would risk an attack upon such a well-defended base. As a result, none of the main anti-aircraft guns were ready for action, and the ammunition for the machine-guns was under lock and key.

Paul Aschbrenner was on board another warship in Battleship Row, USS *Oklahoma*: "They announced over the speaker to man your battle stations… Just as they got the last word out, I can remember very distinctly that a torpedo hit just as I was running down the steps to go to my battle station down at the powder deck aboard the battleship."

After the first torpedoes struck *Oklahoma*, the lights went out. Aschbrenner found himself deep below deck in the dark. "The ship started to list – started to turn over," he continued. "As it was turning over, I got about one or two decks up. I think the next deck was the shell deck. I honestly could see in my heart that I couldn't possibly get out of there in my own strength… And in some miraculous way, I did get out. And as I was getting out of the overhang of the turret, the crude oil and water was coming in."



Death and destruction at Battleship Row. USS *Maryland*, on the left, is pictured at her berth, with men working on the capsized hull of USS *Oklahoma* alongside, during or immediately after the Japanese attack on December 7. (USNHHC)



A vertical aerial view of Battleship Row, beside Ford Island, taken by a Japanese airman during the attacks on the ships moored there. The USS *Arizona*, second from the left, has just been hit near the stern, but she has not yet received the bomb that detonated her forward magazines.

That first wave of Japanese aircraft was led by Commander Mitsuo Fuchida. The pilots' main targets were the great warships lined up in Battleship Row. "One hour and forty minutes after leaving the carriers," wrote Fuchida, "I knew that we should be nearing our goal. Small openings in the thick cloud cover afforded occasional glimpses of the ocean, as I strained my eyes for the first sight of land. Suddenly a long white line of breaking surf appeared directly beneath my plane. It was the northern shore of Oahu.

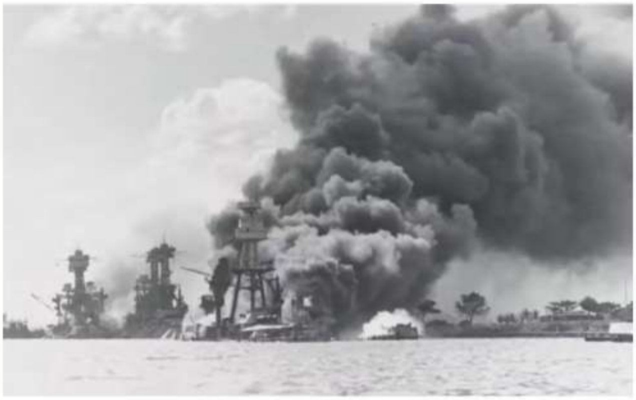
"Veering right toward the west coast of the island, we could see that the sky over Pearl Harbor was clear. Presently the harbor itself became visible across the central Oahu plain, a film of morning mist hovering over it. I peered intently through my binoculars at the ships riding peacefully at anchor. One by one I counted them. Yes, the battleships were there all right, eight of them!

"As we closed in, enemy anti-aircraft fire began to concentrate on us. Dark grey puffs burst all around. Most of them came from ships' batteries, but land batteries were also active… Now it was nearly time for 'Ready to release', and I concentrated my attention on the lead plane to note the instant his bomb was dropped. Suddenly a cloud came between the bombsight and the target, and just as I was thinking that we had already overshot, the lead plane banked slightly and turned right toward Honolulu. We had missed the release point because of the cloud and would have to try again.

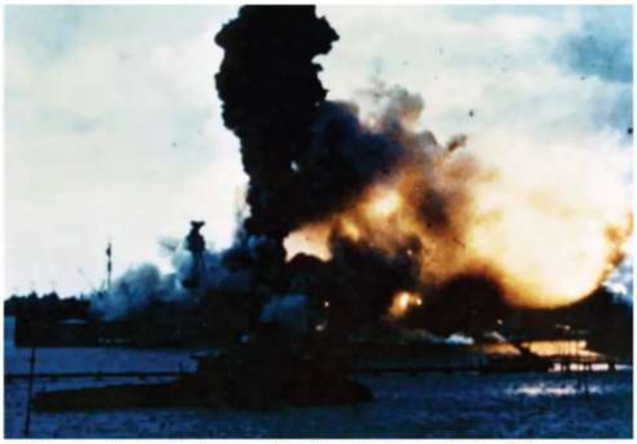
"While my group circled for another attempt, others made their runs, some trying as many as three before succeeding. We were about to begin our second bombing run when there was a colossal explosion in battleship row. A huge column of dark red smoke rose to 1000 meters. It must have been the explosion of a ship's powder magazine. The shock wave was felt even in my plane, several miles away from the harbor."

Lieutenant Commander Harold Pullen, the captain of the destroyer USS *Reid* described the horrifying scene: "The water was afire; the *Arizona* was ablaze; the smoke rose high and black over the Navy Yard; then there was the umbrella of black bursts overhead, and straight ahead the pyre of burning ships, with huge, terrific black clouds of burning oil. Interspersed with the explosion of the bombs and guns was the speed of the flames moving across the water and directing long fingers of flame at me.'

The devastation inflicted upon the battleships was immense. But the Japanese attack was far from over.

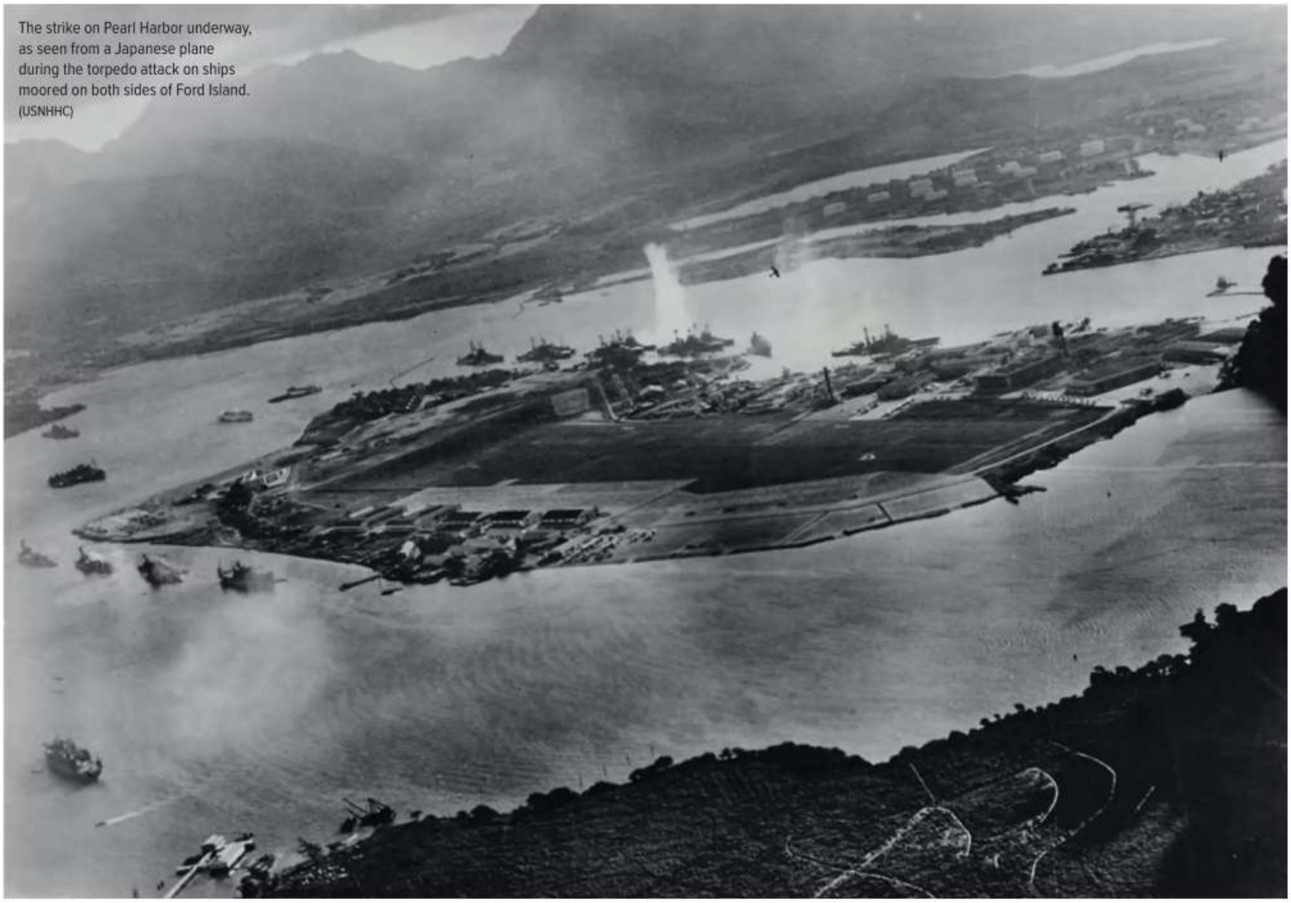


A photograph taken looking up Battleship Row on December 7, 1941, shortly after the Japanese aircraft had departed. Burning furiously, USS *Arizona* can be seen nearest the camera. To the left of her are USS *Tennessee* and the sunken USS *West Virginia*. (USNHHC)



A still from dramatic colour film footage, shot from the decks of the hospital ship USS *Solace*, showing USS *Arizona* ablaze immediately following the explosion of her forward magazines on December 7, 1941. The footage was captured by an Army medical doctor named Eric Haakenson. (USNHHC)

A view of Battleship Row today, with the distinctive USS Arizona Memorial to the right. The white landing stages indicate the mooring points of other US battleships at the time of the attack. (John Grehan)



The strike on Pearl Harbor underway, as seen from a Japanese plane during the torpedo attack on ships moored on both sides of Ford Island. (USNHHC)

DEATH AND DESTRUCTION AT PEARL HARBOR

For the Japanese war plans to succeed, the US Pacific Fleet had to be rendered impotent, so after wrecking the great US battleships, four of which were sunk, the Japanese planes continued their destruction at Pearl Harbor.

As the torpedo-bombers had attacked the great US warships lined up on Battleship Row, other aircraft aimed for the airfield of Wheeler Field, with Mitsubishi Zeros strafing the hangars and the stationary US planes. These fighters were followed by dive bombers and higher altitude bombers, which blasted the airfield. Petty Officer Muranaaka, operating from the Japanese aircraft carrier *Hiryu* in his Zero, was in that first wave: "There was a group of dive bombers over Wheeler Field lining up in a single row with its leading planes already in dive, while torpedo planes crawled low below the clouds. Level bombers were still seen heading to the west as a black group in the air. There were no enemy planes in the air at all. It was indeed a thrilling scene."

The Japanese planes then flew on to the other two major US airfields on Ford Island and at Hickam Field. Such was the degree of surprise the Japanese had achieved, many of the Americans could not believe what they saw, describing the scene as being like a "fantastic movie" or a "bad dream". Others believed it was the Navy holding an exercise on a Sunday.

First Sergeant Carlos F McCuiston was serving with the 19th Transport Squadron at Hickam Field: "We rushed out toward the Post Exchange restaurant in time to see it blasted. Concrete and fragments were flying all around us. A bomb fragment about 12 inches long landed at my feet. It was still smoking from the heat of the exploding bomb.

"To our right, the post theater (a big wooden structure) went up in a cloud of splinters and flames, we had to back up to escape the terrific heat the trade winds pushed in our faces… The roof of the barracks was burning, there was smoke everywhere and the smell of burnt power in the air. The airplanes on the hangar line were burning, there was debris and dirt from the bombs scattered everywhere. I turned and saw a man from our squadron named Bernard Mulcahy. He looked at me and said, 'Bernie, I can't believe what is happening'."

The moment that the forward magazines of USS *Shaw*, in a floating drydock, exploded after the destroyer was hit by Japanese bombs. USS *Nevada*, also hit by the attackers, is on the right. (USNHHC)

Scarcely had the first wave of Japanese bombers turned to return to their carriers than the second wave swooped down upon Pearl Harbor. Conditions were far less benign for the second group of bombers. What guns could be manned were by that time – 08.54 hours – in action and smoke billowing skywards from the fires that raged from the damaged ships and shore installations made target identification more difficult. A few of the defending fighters also managed to get airborne and engage the attackers.

This second Japanese wave was composed of 54 high-level bombers, 78 dive bombers and 56 fighters, which continued the attack upon the ships and installations as well as the Army Air Force base at Bellows Field, where Gordon Jones had been stationed for just five days: "When this new wave of fighters attacked, we were ordered to run and take shelter. Most of us ran to our nearest steel hangar… This bomb attack made us aware that the hangar was not a safe place to be… [so] several of us ran north to an abandoned Officers' Club and hid under it until it too was machine gunned. I managed to crawl out… then climbed under a large thorn bush… for some reason I felt much safer at this point than I had during the entire attack."

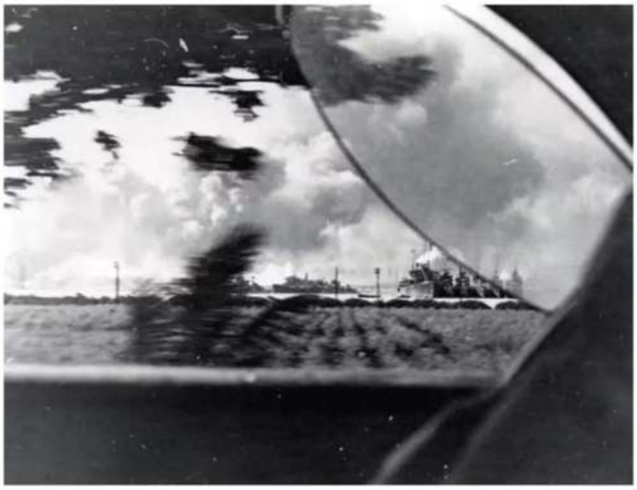
In many regards, the statistics tell the story of the raid upon the Pacific Fleet just as graphically as the accounts of the survivors and witnesses. At the time of the attack there were 96 US ships in Pearl Harbor. Of those, 18 were sunk or seriously damaged, the latter included the remaining four of the Pacific Fleet's battleships in port at the time.

There were 394 US aircraft on the airfields around Oahu, though many were obsolete or under repair. The aircraft actually serviceable comprised 108 fighters, 35 bombers, 11 US Army Air Force observation aircraft, 61 US Navy patrol planes, 36 USN scout planes and 45 classified as "miscellaneous", making a total of 296. The total number of US aircraft destroyed was 188, with a further 159 damaged.

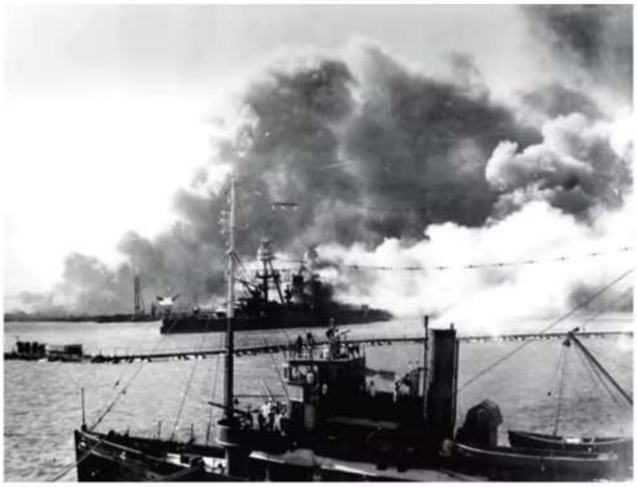
That the Americans were caught in such a state of unpreparedness has been the subject of much debate and subsequently formed the basis of a Congressional investigation. While subsequent investigations have shown that Rear Admiral Edward Kimmel, who was Commander in Chief of the United States Fleet and the US Pacific Fleet, and Major General Walter Short, who was responsible for the defence of US military installations in Hawaii, were not kept fully informed of the latest political, military and intelligence developments, there can be no excuse for Pearl Harbor being so ill-prepared that the enemy was able to attack virtually unchallenged.

Possibly the main reason for this was that Kimmel, and others, believed that should war break out, his fleet would be fighting far from Pearl Harbor. He fully expected to be taking offensive action, not defensive measures, and had trained his ships' crews accordingly. It was also believed that Pearl Harbor, with its hundreds of aircraft, supported by the massed array of anti-aircraft guns mounted ashore and on the ships of the fleet, was too strong for the Japanese to dare attack. Indeed, so unconcerned were Kimmel and Stark they were planning a game of golf that Sunday morning.

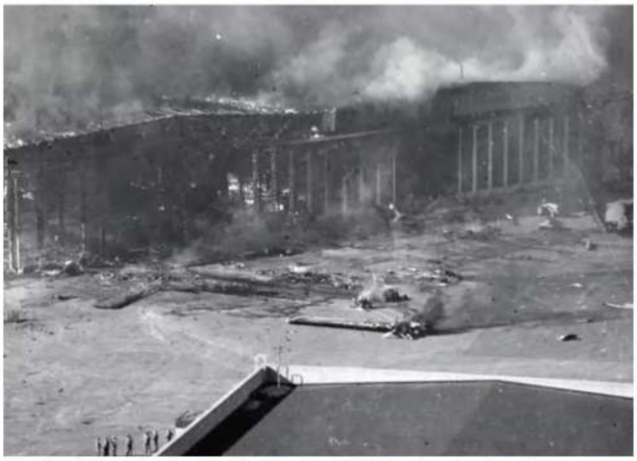
Both Kimmel and Short were found guilty of dereliction of duty.



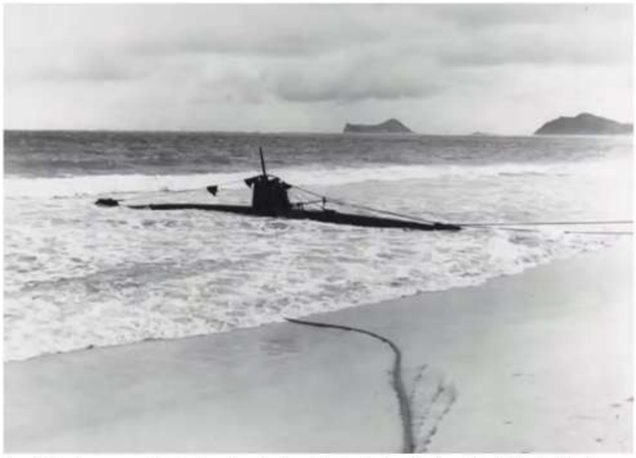
Taken at 09.26 hours on the morning of December 7, from a car on the road in the Aiea area, this image shows the Japanese attack underway. The photographer was looking roughly west-south-west, with destroyer moorings closest to the camera. In the centre of the photograph are USS *Dobbin*, with destroyers *Hull*, *Dewey*, *Worden* and *MacDonough* alongside. (USNHHC)



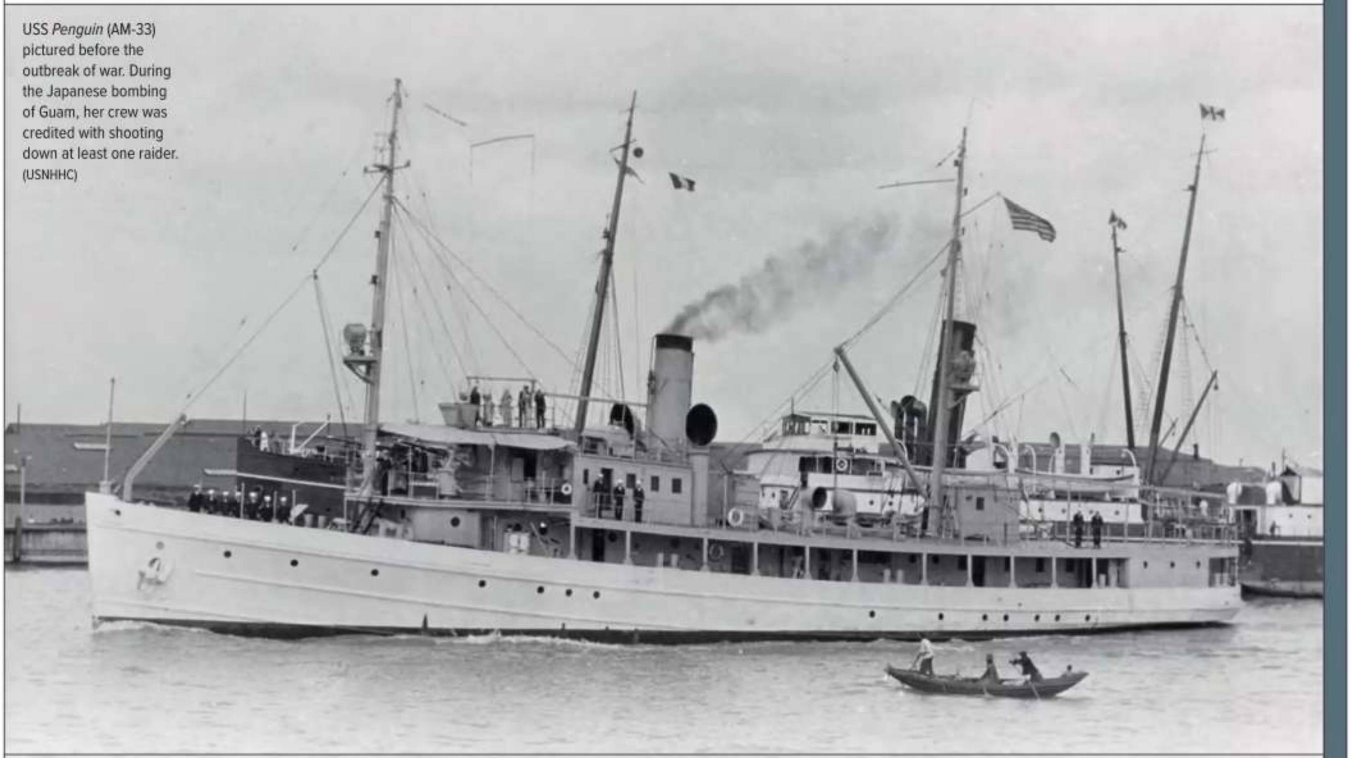
Photographed from Ford Island, USS *Nevada* heads down channel after being intensely attacked by Japanese dive bombers. Hit by six bombs and one torpedo, *Nevada* was beached soon after this picture was taken. She was salvaged and eventually returned to service. USS *Avocet* is in the foreground.



Aircraft and a hangar burning at the Ford Island Naval Air Station's seaplane base, during or immediately after the Japanese air raid. The ruined wings of a PBY Catalina patrol plane are at left and in the centre. Note men with rifles standing in the lower left. (NARA)



One of the Japanese midget submarines that participated in the attack on the US Pacific Fleet, *HA-19*, grounded on a beach in Oahu after failing in its attempt to enter Pearl Harbor and fire its torpedoes. (USNHHC)



USS *Penguin* (AM-33) pictured before the outbreak of war. During the Japanese bombing of Guam, her crew was credited with shooting down at least one raider. (USNHHC)

INVASION OF GUAM

The Japanese plans for victory in the Pacific War also included capturing Guam at the earliest opportunity. Planning for such a move began in earnest in March 1941, when Japanese aircraft began to fly photo-reconnaissance sorties over the US island. For his part in the opening shots of the Pacific campaign, the commander of the Japanese Fourth Fleet was given one simple instruction: "Invade Wake and Guam as quickly as possible at the onset of hostilities."

The US territory of Guam was used as a fuelling station for naval vessels making the long run to and from the Asian continent. It was also a relay point for the vital trans-Pacific cable, the site of a naval radio station, and a stop for Pan American clippers. Assigned to protect it was a token force of just 153 Marines. In support was an 80-strong, locally-raised infantry unit, the Insular Force Guard, and a volunteer native naval militia with 246 ill-armed and ill-trained members. The island's administration was under the command of a US Navy officer, Captain George J McMillin, who had 271 regular Navy personnel with him.

In anticipation of hostile action, all women and children of US citizenship had been evacuated from Guam by October 1941. On December 6, the garrison destroyed all its classified papers and awaited news of the negotiations with Tokyo. The word came at 05.45 hours on December 8, (December 7, Pearl Harbor time), when Captain McMillin was informed of the Japanese assault. In less than three hours, Saipan-based Japanese bombers were over Guam.

There was only one US warship, USS *Penguin*, in the island's naval base, Apra Harbor, and it was this minesweeper that was the first target of the Japanese aircraft. *Penguin*' 3-inch and .50 calibre guns were the only weapons larger than medium calibre machine-guns available to the Guam garrison.

Though *Penguin* did not suffer a direct hit, a group of bombs straddled the ship, killing one, wounding over 60, and causing extensive damage. The minesweeper was scuttled to prevent her capture by the enemy. Her crew made the shore in life rafts; those not seriously wounded continued the defence of Guam.

The Japanese bombers pressed on with their attacks from nearby Saipan throughout the day. As night descended, the Japanese aircraft withdrew and the island remained undisturbed until daylight when the bombers returned.

At around 04.00 hours on December 10, some 400 Japanese sailors of the 5th Defence Force from Saipan came ashore. While an enemy party moved into Agana, where it clashed with the Insular Force Guard, elements of the Japanese South Seas Detached Force (approximately 5,500 men) conducted further landings at points around the coast.

Though the defenders resisted for as long as possible, there could only be one outcome. After suffering 19 men killed and 42 wounded, the garrison was eventually overwhelmed. Though sporadic resistance continued across Guam, the island was effectively in Japanese hands by December 10.

Corporal James R Martin USMC displays a sword he found amid the ruins of a Japanese officer's quarters on Saipan. An engraving on the sword identified it as belonging to Captain Walter Nevins Flournoy USMC, who was taken prisoner by the Japanese on Guam in December 1941. (National Museum of the US Navy)

THE JAPANESE LAND IN MALAYA

It was just after midnight local time – the International Date Line passes through the centre of the Pacific Ocean – on December 8, 1941, a little more than 30 minutes before the first bombs began to fall on Hawaii, that Japanese troops landed near Kota Bharu on the north-east coast of British-controlled Malaya. The Japanese naval force that Air Chief Marshal Brooke-Popham had refused to initiate Operation *Matador* against was about to make its presence felt.

The dramatic events of the night of December 7/8, 1941, were later recalled by Lieutenant-General A E Percival, the General Officer Commanding Malaya at the time: "At about 2345 hrs on the 7th December the Beach Defence troops on Badang and Sabak beaches, the point of junction of which at the Kuala Pa'amat was about one and a half miles N.E of the Kota Bharu aerodrome, reported ships anchoring off the coast. Shortly afterwards our beach defence artillery opened fire and the enemy ships started shelling the beaches.

"At about 0025 hrs on the 8th December the leading Japanese troops landed at the junction of the Badang and Sabak beaches and by 0100 hrs, after heavy fighting, had succeeded in capturing the adjacent pill-boxes manned by troops of the 3/I7 Dogras. The garrisons of the latter inflicted very heavy casualties on the enemy before being themselves wiped out almost to a man.

"Hudson aircraft between midnight and dawn pressed home numerous attacks in the face of heavy A.A. fire from warships and transports. One of the transports which is believed to have contained tanks and artillery was set on fire, either by air attack or gunfire, or perhaps both, and prevented from discharging its cargo."

As Percival noted, the landings had occurred near RAF Kota Bharu – from where the Hudsons that sighted the Japanese a few hours earlier had been operating. Writing in *The Weekend Australian*, the author Patrick Walters reveals that the "airfield itself came under repeated attack from Japanese navy Zero fighters flying from nearby Thailand. In the afternoon, the situation became perilous with pockets of Japanese troops penetrating close to the airfield perimeter. Just before dusk, having received orders from Singapore that the airfield should be abandoned, 1 Squadron's five remaining serviceable aircraft took off for Kuantan, heavily laden with men and vital supplies. A total of eight aircraft had been lost in the short-lived battle to defend Kota Bharu."

Taken from a captured wartime Japanese news reel, this picture shows Japanese soldiers landing on a beach during the invasion of Malaya, December 8/9, 1941. (Critical Past)

Despite initial British moves intended to thwart the Japanese attacks, including orders being issued for troops to move over the border into Thailand, by nightfall on the 8th, with the threat of enemy landings further down the coast, the British commander sought permission to withdraw if necessary. Already the British grip on this part of its Empire was slipping. For their part, though, the Japanese had their eyes firmly set on the ultimate prize – the island of Singapore which lay some 350 miles to the south.

Taken from the same news reel as the illustration above, this image depicts Japanese soldiers on a beach during the landings in Malaya, December 1941. Note the ships of the invasion force in the background. (Critical Past)

Japanese troops march into Hong Kong, December 1941. (Historic Military Press)

CAUTION
NARROW BRIDGE

HONG KONG ATTACKED

Another of Britain's colonies, Hong Kong, was the next to be attacked by Emperor Hirohito's forces. "During the early days of December as the situation progressively deteriorated so were more and more troops deployed," wrote the British commander, Major-General C M Maltby, in his subsequent despatch, "until on the evening of 7th December all were in their battle positions. By evening very definite reports were received of concentrations of Japanese forces in the villages bordering the frontier."

At 06.45 hours the next morning, the British and Commonwealth garrison – which included Canadian and Indian units – had "been informed that the British Empire and Japan were at war". Seventy-five minutes later the Japanese struck, when, at 08.00 hours, aircraft attacked RAF Kai Tak, "down to 60 feet, showing first class standard", and the barracks at Shamshuipo.

At the same time, troops from Lieutenant-General Takashi Sakai's 23rd Army crossed from China into the colony. "The Japanese began bridging at Lo Wu," continued Maltby, "and our observation posts reported hundreds of Japanese crossing into Laffans Plain… The mechanised portion of Forward Troops, composed of two armoured cars and four Bren carriers, co-operated most effectively in ambushing a Japanese platoon in close formation. It was virtually wiped out by machine gun and light automatic fire from one hundred yards range. The enemy never relaxed his pressure during the bright moonlit night. It was obvious that his small columns, using cross country tracks, were led by guides who knew the ground intimately, thus enabling the attack to develop quicker than had been thought possible."

Supported by numerous air strikes, the Japanese troops continued to probe forward, deeper and deeper into the British enclave. On the 10th, the RAF was ordered to abandon Kai Tak aerodrome and destroy any aircraft and equipment that could not be evacuated. Then, at midday on the 11th, Maltby authorised a withdrawal from the mainland.

At 21.00 hours on December 15, a battery of the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Corps reported that the Japanese were attempting to land on Hong Kong Island near the Pak Sha Wan Battery. "It was ascertained later from several sources," noted Maltby, "that a very bold attempt was made by the enemy who, with small rubber boats and petrol tin rafts for equipment, swam across in fair strength… All were shot in the water." It was four days before Sakai's infantry successfully crossed Kowloon Bay to land on Hong Kong island.

As the Japanese offensive continued, the situation in Hong Kong gradually deteriorated. Civilian casualties were mounting, and water started to run out as the enemy captured the reservoirs one by one. By the afternoon of December 25, 1941, after 17 days of battle, it was clear that further resistance would be futile and Sir Mark Young, the Governor, and General Maltby surrendered in person to General Sakai at the Japanese headquarters. It was the first occasion in history in which a British Crown Colony had surrendered to an invading force.

Taken from a news reel, this picture shows Japanese troops awaiting an inspection having participated in a victory parade down Hong Kong's Queen Street. (Critical Past)

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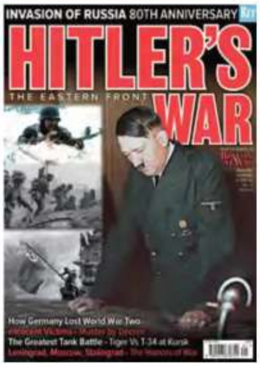

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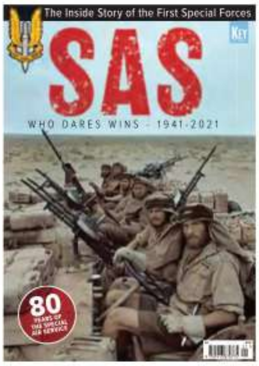

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Winston Churchill reads from a script as he records a radio broadcast in 1941. (National Museum of Denmark)

BRITAIN IS AT WAR WITH JAPAN

At 13.00 hours on December 8, 1941, Sir Robert Craigie, the British Ambassador in Tokyo, sent a letter to the Japanese Chargé d'Affaires, Shinichi Kamimura. The message it carried was a blunt one: "On the evening of December 7th His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom learned that Japanese forces, without previous warning, either in the form of a declaration of war or of an ultimatum with a conditional declaration of war, had attempted a landing on the coast of Malaya and bombed Singapore and Hong Kong…

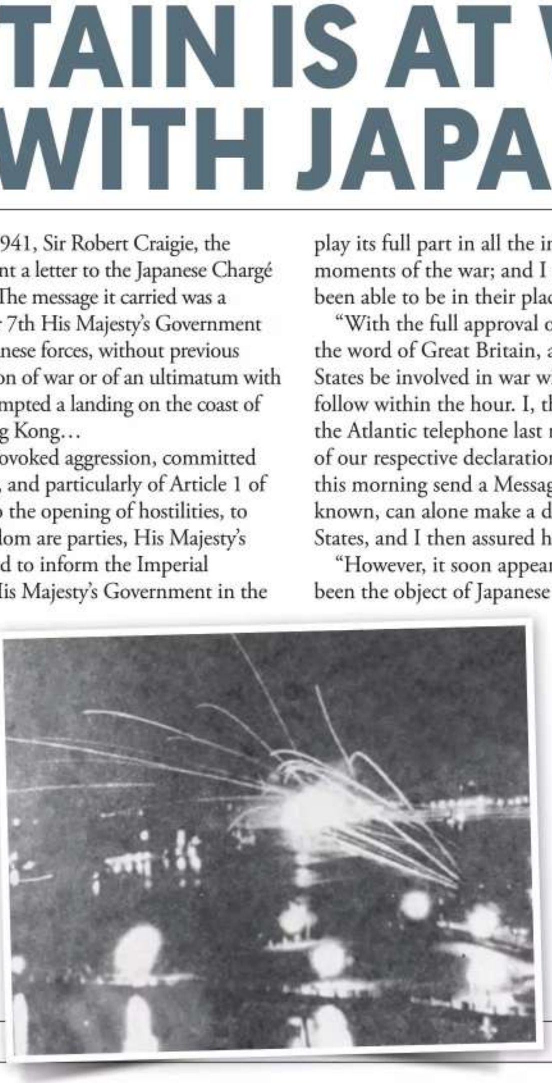
"In view of these wanton acts of unprovoked aggression, committed in flagrant violation of international law, and particularly of Article 1 of the Third Hague Convention, relative to the opening of hostilities, to which both Japan and the United Kingdom are parties, His Majesty's Ambassador at Tokyo has been instructed to inform the Imperial Japanese Government, in the name of His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom, that a state of war exists between the two countries."

Speaking in the House of Commons on December 8, soon after this communication had been delivered to the Japanese, Winston Churchill outlined the steps that had been taken in the hours since the attacks in the Pacific: "As soon as I heard, last night, that Japan had attacked the United States, I felt it necessary that Parliament should be immediately summoned. It is indispensable to our system of government that Parliament should play its full part in all the important acts of State and at all the crucial moments of the war; and I am glad to see that so many Members have been able to be in their places, despite the shortness of the notice.

"With the full approval of the nation, and of the Empire, I pledged the word of Great Britain, about a month ago, that should the United States be involved in war with Japan, a British declaration of war would follow within the hour. I, therefore, spoke to President Roosevelt on the Atlantic telephone last night, with a view to arranging the timing of our respective declarations. The President told me that he would this morning send a Message to Congress, which, of course, as is well known, can alone make a declaration of war on behalf of the United States, and I then assured him that we would follow immediately.

"However, it soon appeared that British territory in Malaya had also been the object of Japanese attack, and later on it was announced, from Tokyo, that the Japanese High Command – a curious form; not the Imperial Japanese Government – had declared that a state of war existed with Great Britain and the United States.

"That being so, there was no need to wait for the declaration by Congress. American time is very nearly six hours behind ours. The Cabinet, therefore, which met at 12.30 to-day, authorised an immediate declaration of war upon Japan." During the hours that followed, other nations followed suit.



The British river gunboat MS *Peterel* under attack from Japanese forces in Shanghai on December 8, 1941. She was sunk during this engagement. (USNHHC)

AMERICA DECLARES WAR

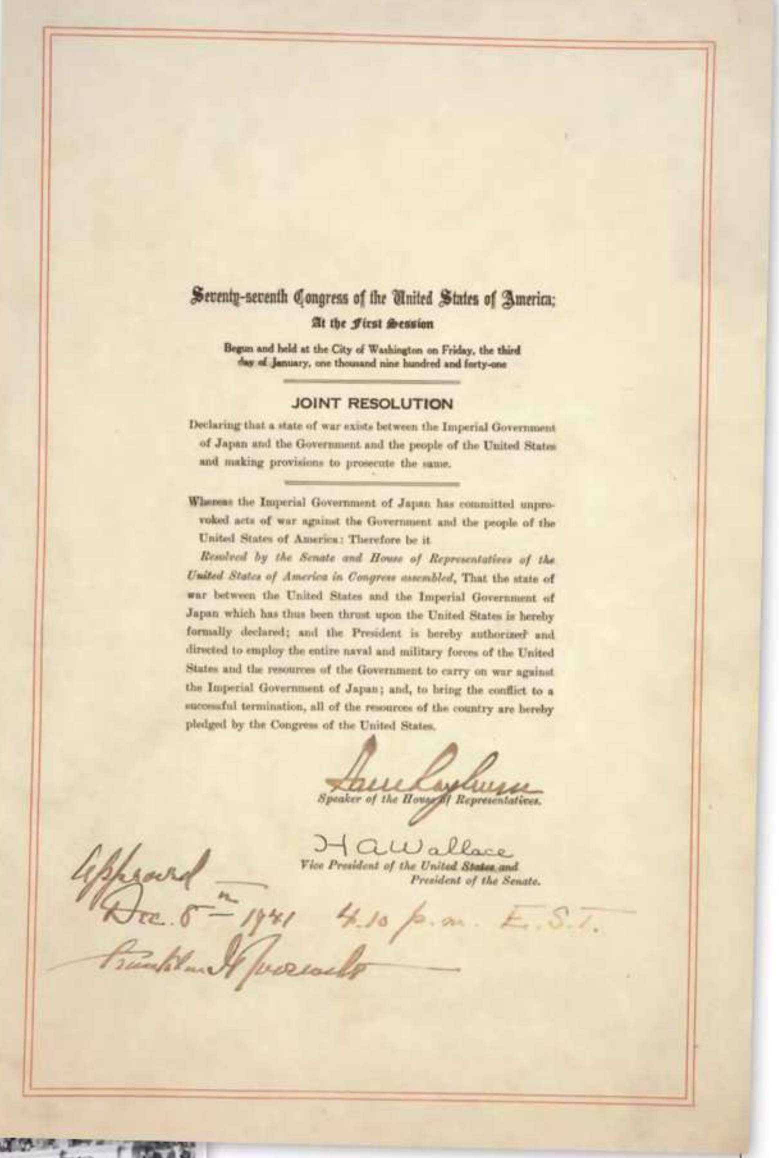
Churchill had been dining at the Prime Minister's country residence of Chequers with the American ambassador, John Winant, and the President's personal representative, Averell Harriman, when a butler brought in a radio for the party to listen to the BBC Home Service. It was at this point that they heard the shattering news of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

The Prime Minister immediately called Franklin D Roosevelt in Washington D.C. "Mr. President, what's this about Japan?" The booming voice of the US President came back down the line: "It's quite true. They have attacked us at Pearl Harbor… We are all in the same boat now."

Churchill was under no illusion what these words meant for the Allied cause. "I could not foretell the course of events," he later wrote. "I do not pretend to have measured accurately the martial might of Japan, but now at this very moment I knew the United States was in the war, up to the neck and in to the death. So we had won after all… Being saturated and satiated with emotion and sensation, I went to bed and slept the sleep of the saved and thankful."

A few hours after Churchill had spoken in the House of Commons on December 8, the American president rose to speak in the US Congress: "Yesterday, December 7, 1941 – a date which will live in infamy – the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan.

"The United States was at peace with that nation, and, at the solicitation of Japan, was still in conversation with its government and its emperor looking toward the maintenance of peace in the Pacific. Indeed, one hour after Japanese air squadrons had commenced bombing in the American island of Oahu, the Japanese ambassador to the United States and his colleague delivered to our Secretary of State a formal reply to a recent American message. While this reply stated that it seemed useless to continue the existing diplomatic negotiations, it contained no threat or hint of war or armed attack.



Seventy-seventh Congress of the United States of America;
At the First Session
Begun and held at the City of Washington on Friday, the third day of January, one thousand nine hundred and forty-one

JOINT RESOLUTION

Declaring that a state of war exists between the Imperial Government of Japan and the Government and the people of the United States and making provisions to prosecute the same.

Whereas the Imperial Government of Japan has committed unprovoked acts of war against the Government and the people of the United States of America: Therefore be it

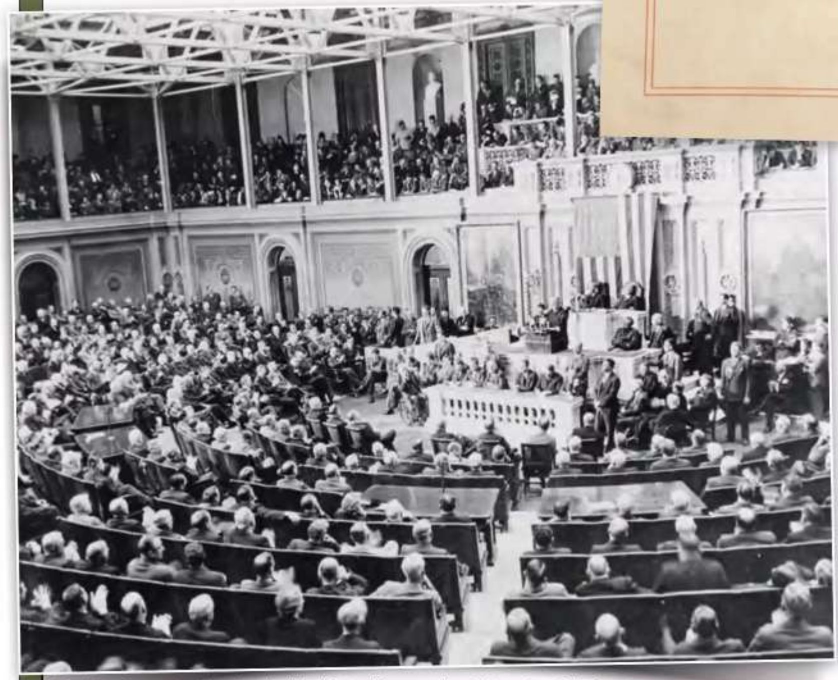
Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the state of war between the United States and the Imperial Government of Japan which has thus been thrust upon the United States is hereby formally declared; and the President is hereby authorized and directed to employ the entire naval and military forces of the United States and the resources of the Government to carry on war against the Imperial Government of Japan; and, to bring the conflict to a successful termination, all of the resources of the country are hereby pledged by the Congress of the United States.

Sam Rayburn
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

H A Wallace
Vice President of the United States and President of the Senate.

Approved Dec. 8th 1941 4.10 p.m. E.S.T.
Franklin D Roosevelt

The United States' declaration of war against Japan. (NARA)



President Roosevelt addressing the United States' Congress, in a joint session of the Senate and House of Representatives, on December 8, 1941. (USNHHC)

"It will be recorded that the distance of Hawaii from Japan makes it obvious that the attack was deliberately planned many days or even weeks ago. During the intervening time the Japanese government has deliberately sought to deceive the United States by false statements and expressions of hope for continued peace.

"The attack yesterday on the Hawaiian Islands has caused severe damage to American naval and military forces. I regret to tell you that very many American lives have been lost… Japan has, therefore, undertaken a surprise offensive extending throughout the Pacific area. The facts of yesterday and today speak for themselves."

Lasting some seven minutes, Roosevelt's address was heard by a staggering 81 percent of America's radio-listening public. Within an hour, Congress passed a formal declaration of war against Japan. The United States of America was officially brought into World War Two.

Personnel of the US Embassy in Tokyo pictured outside the building's main entrance in April 1942. The staff seen here had been interned since December 7, 1941. They have gathered together prior to their repatriation to the United States in exchange for the Japanese diplomatic mission in America. (USNHHC)

THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

One hour after Japanese bombers struck at Pearl Harbor on the morning of December 7, 1941, the Australian Prime Minister, John Curtin, announced to the world that "from one hour ago, Australia has been at war with the Japanese Empire". The Australian government's formal declaration of war followed at 11.15 hours, Australian time, on December 9 – December 8 in the US.

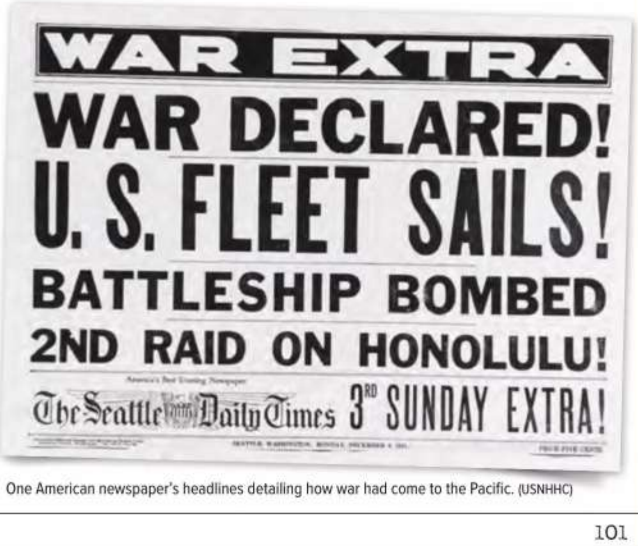
Speaking at the time of his nation's entry into the war, Prime Minister Curtin said: "The Australian Government and its representatives abroad have struggled hard to prevent a breakdown of this kind. We did not want war in the Pacific. The Australian Government has repeatedly made it clear, as have the Governments of the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and the Netherlands East Indies, that if war came to the Pacific, it would be of Japan's making. Japan has now made war… For the first time in the history of the Pacific, armed conflict stalks abroad. No other country than Japan desired war in the Pacific. The responsibility for this actual resort to war is therefore upon Japan... Australia goes to its battle stations in defence of its very way of living."

Late on the evening of December 7, the Canadian Prime Minister, W L Mackenzie King, announced his government's decision to declare war on Japan. "So," notes one account, "Canada acted first". However, the King approved Canada's declaration of war in a proclamation issued the following day.

New Zealand also formally declared war with Japan on December 8, 1941. At the time Japan launched its attacks, New Zealand had military personnel based in Burma, Malaya, Fiji, and the Gilbert Islands. Interestingly, it was at Butaritari Atoll in the northern Gilbert Islands that New Zealanders felt the first direct impact of the Japanese attacks. On December 10, Japanese troops occupied Butaritari, capturing seven New Zealand coast-watchers in the process. They were some of the very first Allied prisoners of war to be transported to Japan.

In his speech to the House of Commons on December 8, Winston Churchill defiantly spoke of the combined effort that the war spreading to the Pacific would entail: "The ordeal to which the English-speaking world and our heroic Russian Allies are being exposed will certainly be hard, especially at the outset, and it will probably be long. But when we look around us, upon the sombre panorama of the world, we have no reason to doubt the justice of our cause, nor have we any reason to doubt that our strength and our willpower will be sufficient to sustain it.

"We have at least four-fifths of the population of the globe upon our side. We are responsible for their safety – we are responsible for their future. And as I told the House of Commons this afternoon, in the past we had a light which flickered, in the present we have a light which flames, and in the future there will be a light which will shine calm and resplendent over all the land and all the sea!"



WAR EXTRA

WAR DECLARED!

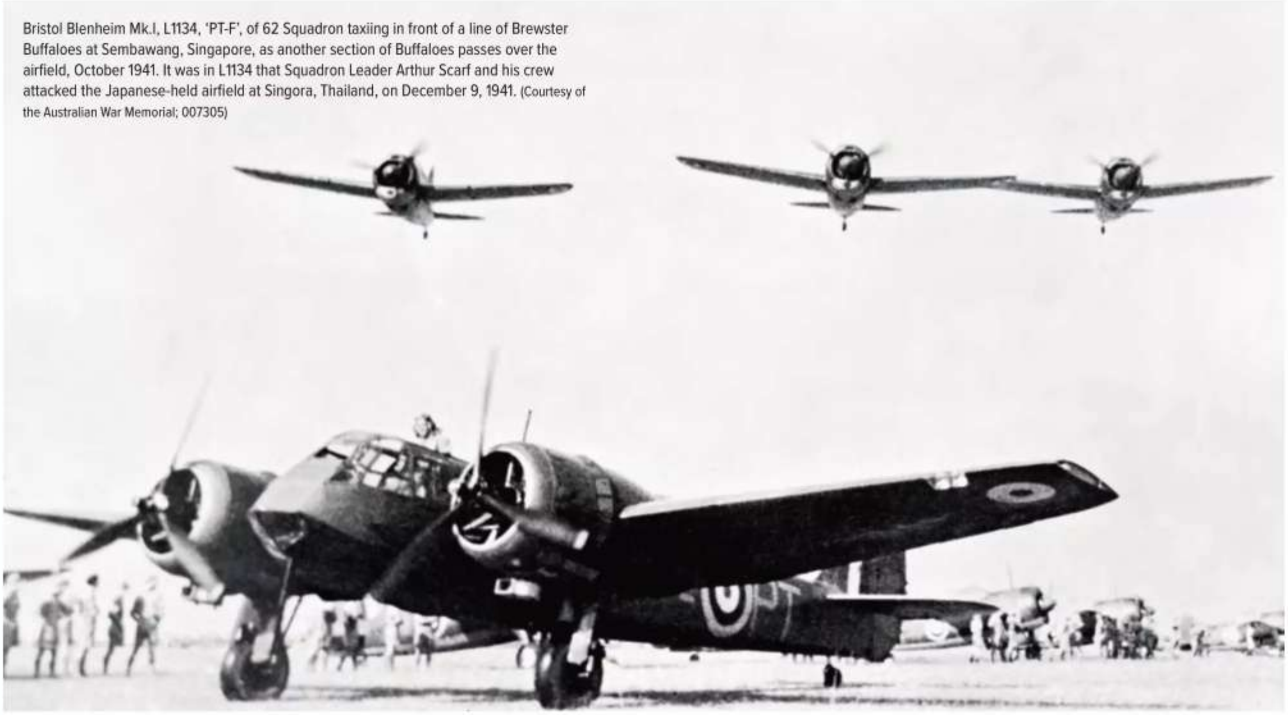
U. S. FLEET SAILS!

BATTLESHIP BOMBED

2ND RAID ON HONOLULU!

The Seattle Daily Times 3RD SUNDAY EXTRA!

One American newspaper's headlines detailing how war had come to the Pacific. (USNHHC)



Bristol Blenheim Mk.I, L1134, 'PT-F', of 62 Squadron taxiing in front of a line of Brewster Buffaloes at Sembawang, Singapore, as another section of Buffaloes passes over the airfield, October 1941. It was in L1134 that Squadron Leader Arthur Scarf and his crew attacked the Japanese-held airfield at Singora, Thailand, on December 9, 1941. (Courtesy of the Australian War Memorial; 007305)

FIRST FAR EAST VC ACTION

Arthur Stewart King Scarf joined the RAF in January 1936. After flying Handley Page Heyfords and Hawker Hinds with Nos. 9 and 61 squadrons, 'Pongo' Scarf was posted to Abingdon where a new unit was being formed – 62 Squadron. Equipped with the Bristol Blenheim Mk.I, 62 Squadron departed for Singapore in August 1939. It was based at RAF Alor Star when Japanese troops landed at Kota Bahru on December 8, 1941.

The following day, all of 62 Squadron's serviceable aircraft were flown to Butterworth some 45 miles to the south. A few hours later the squadron was ordered to attack Japanese airfields at Singora and Patani. The first of 62 Squadron's Blenheims to get airborne was L1134, coded 'PT-F', which was piloted by Squadron Leader 'Pongo' Scarf, with Flight Sergeant F 'Paddy" Calder in the navigator's seat and Flight Sergeant Cyril Guy Rich manning the dorsal turret.

Squadron Leader Arthur Scarf was buried in what is now plot 2. G. 14. of Taiping War Cemetery in the north-west of Malaysia. (Courtesy of the CWGC)

As soon as he was airborne, Scarf circled the airfield to await the remainder of his squadron. But at that moment a formation of Japanese bombers appeared. The Blenheims, sat impotently on the ground, made perfect targets. All were hit and Scarf soon realised that none of them would be joining him in the attack upon the Japanese air bases.

Scarf would have been entirely justified in abandoning the raid; after all it had been intended to have been a "formation sortie". Scarf, however, pressed on. Keeping low over the plains, he evaded a number of Japanese fighters, but as the lone bomber neared Singora more fighters closed in.

Scarf pressed on with his attack upon the enemy airfield. The Blenheim levelled out and executed a bomb run right across the base. Scarf released his bombs as Rich fired into the rows of Japanese aircraft lined up. A second pass was then made, at which point, Scarf found himself facing two formations of enemy fighters, six in each wave. Scarf took immediate evasive action. He threw his Blenheim around, almost brushing the tree-tops and skimming the huge limestone outcrops.

Despite the crew's endeavours, cannon shells and machine-gun bullets riddled the Blenheim and Scarf was soon severely wounded. He was left-handed and one burst of bullets shattered his left arm. Then another burst tore through his seat into his back. Despite his wounds, Scarf, supported by Rich and Calder, managed to nurse the Blenheim back to Alor Star; the Japanese fighters abandoned their pursuit at the Malayan border.

Pulled from the cockpit, Scarf was rushed to the operating theatre, but died of his wounds two hours later. Because of the chaos of the British retreat following the Japanese invasion, many records were lost or destroyed and it was not until after the end of the war that Scarf's actions were brought to the attention of the RAF's higher authorities. As a result, his award of the Victoria Cross was not gazetted until June 1946. Scarf's was the first VC action of the war in the Far East.

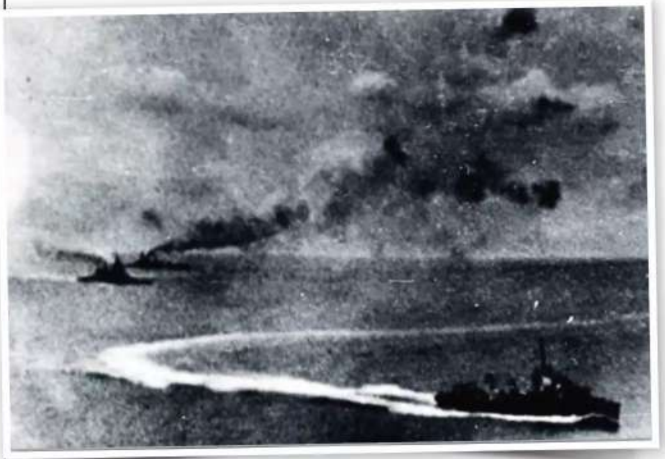
DISASTER AT SEA

As the evidence of an impending Japanese attack grew, the new 35,000-ton King George V-class battleship, and pride of the British fleet, HMS *Prince of Wales*, accompanied by the 32,000-ton battle-cruiser HMS *Repulse*, had been sent to Singapore to bolster the British presence in the region. Supported by four destroyers, HMS *Electra*, HMS *Express*, HMS *Tenedos* and the Australian vessel HMAS *Vampire*, this naval squadron, commanded by Vice-Admiral Sir Tom Phillips, was known as Force Z.

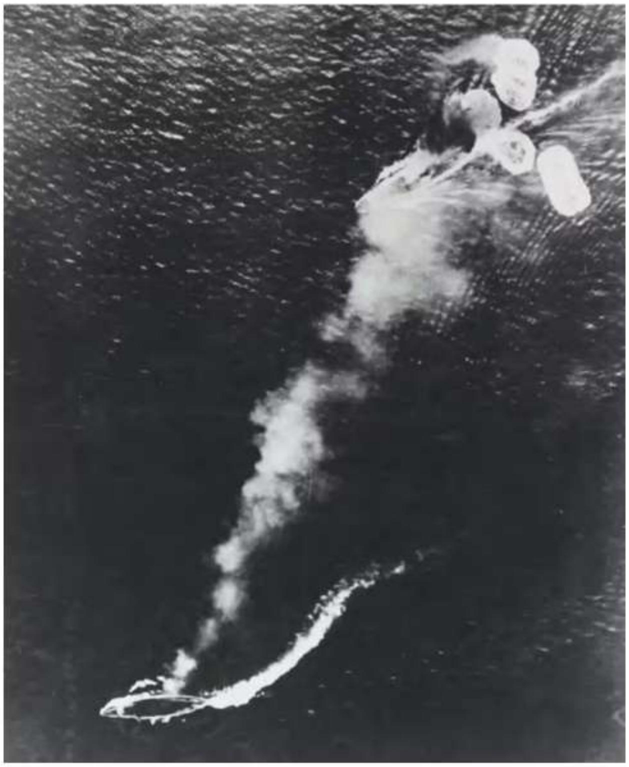
Following the Japanese attacks on December 7/8, Phillips was ordered to put to sea to try and interdict any further Japanese landings on the Malayan coast. Force Z duly sailed from Singapore at 17.35 hours on December 8.

With frequent rainstorms and low cloud, the weather conditions during most of December 9 helped Force Z avoid being spotted by the Japanese. This run of luck ended when the weather cleared between 17.00 hours and 18.30 hours, at which point three Japanese naval reconnaissance aircraft were sighted in quick succession by lookouts on *Prince of Wales*.

Aware that he could not endanger the pride of the Royal Navy, Phillips decided to return to Singapore – some of the escorts were also low on fuel. But Japanese submarines had shadowed the British ships, information that was passed on to the 22nd Air Flotilla which was based at Saigon in French Indochina. Consequently, on the morning of December 10, Japanese Mitsubishi G3M Type 96 torpedo-bombers launched a devastating assault against Force Z which was caught with no aerial protection.



A view of the attack on HMS *Prince of Wales* and HMS *Repulse*, again taken from a Japanese aircraft. HMS *Prince of Wales* is at far left, with HMS *Repulse* beyond her. A destroyer, either *Express* or *Electra*, is manoeuvring in the foreground. At least one source states that this photograph was taken after the first torpedo attack, during which *Prince of Wales* sustained heavy torpedo damage. (National Museum of the US Navy)



Taken from a Japanese aircraft during the initial high-level bombing attack, this dramatic image shows the attacks on HMS *Prince of Wales* and HMS *Repulse*. The latter, which can be seen near the bottom of the view, has just been hit by one bomb and near-missed by several more. *Prince of Wales*, meanwhile, is near the top of the image, generating a considerable amount of smoke. (USNHHC)

One of *Prince of Wales*' crew, Ordinary Seaman Derek Wilson, later recalled the Japanese onslaught: "I could see a formation of about ten planes skimming low on the water towards us… The planes came on remorselessly as all the pom-poms, machine guns and the Bofors guns opened up. All hell seemed to be let loose at once, but nothing seemed to stop them."

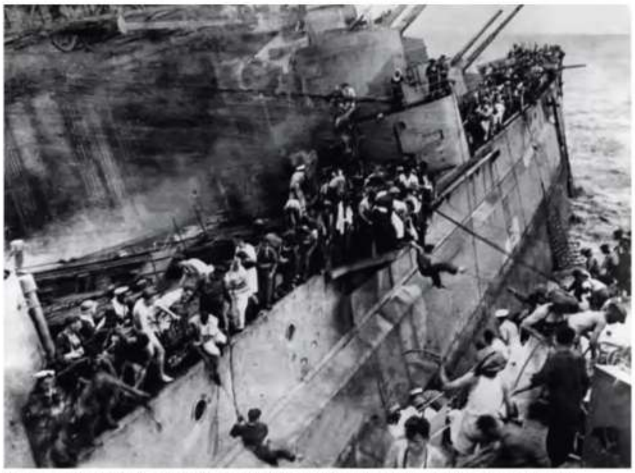
This first attack saw eight G3M bombers concentrating solely upon *Repulse*. Though they all released their bombs, only one hit the battle-cruiser. "Explosions erupted either side of the ship, covering her in heavy spray," recalled Ted Matthews, who was serving in the aft high-angle director on *Repulse*. "Suddenly, there was a tremendous detonation. We'd been hit on the port hangar."

HMS *Prince of Wales* leaving Singapore Harbour, heading for action off the east coast of Malaya, on December 8, 1941. (Australian War Memorial; 041562)

As it transpired, the bomb caused no serious damage to the battlecruiser and almost half an hour passed before a second attack developed. But this time the 17 aircraft involved were Type 96 torpedo-bombers.

Eight of the Japanese aircraft made for *Prince of Wales*. Seven of the torpedoes they unleashed sped harmlessly wide of the battleship, but the eighth struck *Prince of Wales* at the point where the shaft of its port propeller exited the ship, allowing water to pour in. *Prince of Wales* immediately began to list and, as water rushed through other areas of the ship, power was lost to her pumps and some of her guns. The ship was now difficult to manoeuvre and unable to defend herself adequately. When 26 Mitsubishi G4M torpedo bombers then launched their torpedoes against the battleship, she was struck three times and shuddered to a halt.

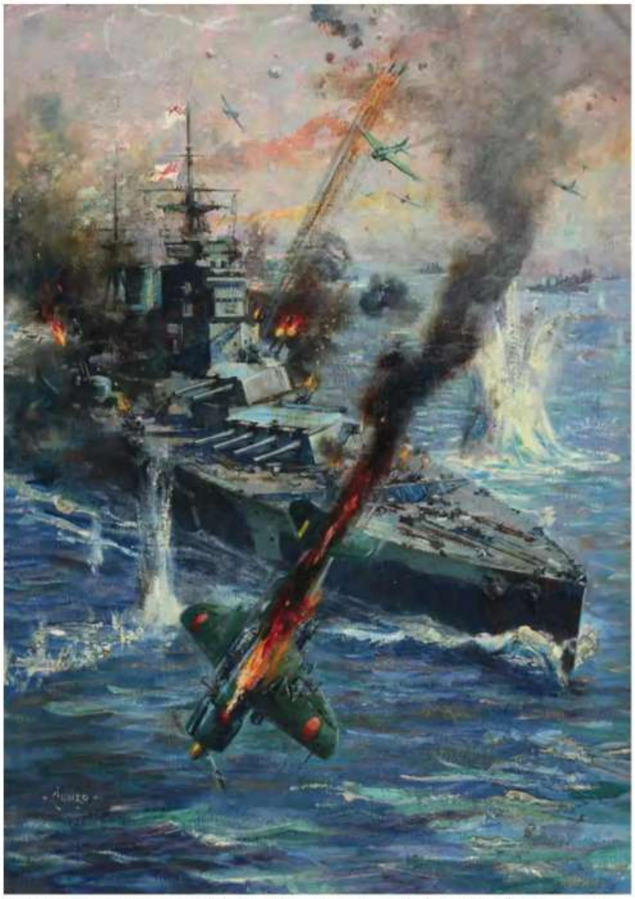
War Correspondent Edward O'Dowd *Gallagher*, a South African reporter for the *Daily Mail*, was on board *Repulse* and recorded *Prince of Wales*' final moments: "Her outline is hardly distinguishable in smoke and flame from all her guns except the fourteen-inchers. I can see one plane release a torpedo. It drops nose heavy into the sea and churns up a small wake as it drives straight at the *Prince of Wales*. It explodes against her bows. A couple of seconds later another explodes amidships and another astern. Gazing at her turning over on the port side with her stern going under and with dots of men leaping from her."



As the disaster unfolds, some of the crew of the sinking HMS *Prince of Wales* abandon ship, transferring, where they can, to the destroyer HMS *Express*. Moments later, the list on *Prince of Wales* suddenly increased and *Express* had to withdraw. (Australian War Memorial; P02018.055)

At the same time as this last torpedo attack developed against *Prince of Wales*, further aircraft pounced on *Repulse*. Their final assault was recounted by the senior surviving officer, Captain William Tennant: "Torpedo bomber aircraft seemed to appear from several directions and the second torpedo hit the ship in the vicinity of the Gunroom and apparently jammed the rudder… Shortly after this at least three torpedoes hit the ship, two being on the port side and one on the starboard side. I knew now that she could not survive and at once gave the order for everyone to come on deck and to cast loose Carley floats…

"The decision for a Commanding Officer to cease all work in the ship below is an exceedingly difficult one, but I felt very sure that she would not survive four torpedoes, and this was borne out for she only remained afloat about six or seven minutes after I gave the order for everyone to come on deck…



By Terence Cuneo, this painting, produced for the Ministry of Information during the war, depicts the two Royal Navy warships under attack on December 10, 1941. When the two great ships sank, 840 men went to their deaths. (The National Archives; INF3-45)

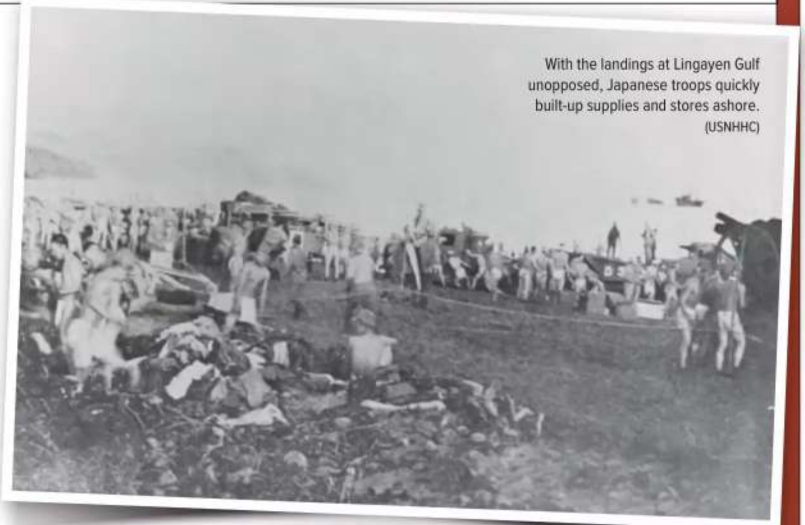
"When these final two or three torpedoes detonated, the ship rapidly commenced to take up a heavy list to port. Men were now pouring up on deck… I never saw the slightest sign of panic or ill discipline… The ship hung for at least a minute and a half to two minutes with a list of about 60 degrees or 70 degrees to port and then rolled over at 1233."

Commissioned in January 1941, HMS *Prince of Wales* had been the Royal Navy's latest battleship – the pride of the fleet. On December 19, however, she became the first capital ship ever to be sunk by naval air power on the open sea.

Winston Churchill received the devastating news the next morning by telephone from the First Sea Lord, Sir Dudley Pound. "In all the war," Churchill solemnly declared, "I never received a more direct shock... As I turned over and twisted in bed the full horror of the news sank in upon me. There were no British or American ships in the Indian Ocean or the Pacific except the American survivors of Pearl Harbor, who were hastening back to California. Over all this vast expanse of waters Japan was supreme, and we everywhere were weak and naked."

HMS *Prince of Wales* pictured listing heavily after the attack on December 10. Members of the crew can be seen scrambling over the side into lifeboats. Some 2,320 men from both warships were saved. (Australian War Memorial; P02018.058)

JAPANESE FORCES INVADE THE PHILIPPINES



With the landings at Lingayen Gulf unopposed, Japanese troops quickly built-up supplies and stores ashore. (USNHHC)

The Philippine Islands came under US control in May 1898, when they were seized from Spain after an American victory in Manila Bay during the Spanish-American War. Formal title to the islands was granted to the United States by the Treaty of Paris in December of that year.

That the conquest of the Philippines had long been an ambition of the Japanese was a reality that the American Government was well aware of. Consequently, the islands had been placed under the military command of General Douglas MacArthur, who was designated commander of the United States Armed Forces in the Asia-Pacific region. No-one, not least MacArthur, doubted that the Philippines would be one of Japan's primary targets following the strike against Pearl Harbor.

It was just five days before the Japanese made their first move against the archipelago, though the island of Batan, 120 miles north of Luzon (the largest and most populous island in the Philippines), was occupied on the 8th. They finally struck on December 12, when the Japanese 14th Army, under the command of Lieutenant General Masaharu Homma, began the first landings at Legazpi. Ten days later the main Japanese amphibious assault was delivered against the north of Luzon, targeting the area of Lingayen Gulf with its proximity to the Philippine capital.

Covered by gunfire from cruisers and destroyers, the Japanese troops allocated to the first waves to go ashore at Lingayen Gulf began climbing into their landing craft at 02.00 hours on December 22. By 04.30 hours, two battalions of the 47th Infantry and one battalion of the 48th Mountain Artillery were in their landing craft, ready to head for their landing beaches. At 05.17 hours the first invaders touched down on the beach south of Agoo Municipality.

"The transfer of the troops to the landing craft had proved extremely difficult because of high seas," noted the official US historian Louis Morton. "The light craft were heavily buffeted on the way to shore and the men and equipment soaked by the spray. The radios were made useless by salt water, and there was no communication with the first waves ashore. Even ship-to-ship communication was inadequate. The men had a difficult time in the heavy surf, and it proved impossible to land heavy equipment. The high seas threw many of the landing craft up on the beach, overturning some and beaching others so firmly that they could not be put back into operation for a full day. The second wave could not land as planned, with the result that the entire landing schedule was disrupted."

Nevertheless, despite these problems General Homma was able to get the bulk of his forces ashore at Lingayen Gulf with little opposition. As they started to push out from the beachhead, his troops soon secured the northern approaches to Manila itself. The Battle for the Philippines had swung decisively in Homma's favour.

Japanese troops landing at Lingayen Gulf, on the northeast coast of Luzon Island, on December 22, 1941. These landings constituted the main element of the Japanese invasion of the Philippines. (USNHHC)

Soon after his arrival, Churchill accompanied Roosevelt to the latter's December 23 briefing with 100 American reporters – seen here. The press corps are reported to have "cheered when the 5-foot-6 prime minister climbed onto his chair so they all could see him". He was "somewhat shorter than expected," the *New York Times* noted, "but with confidence and determination written on the countenance so familiar to the world". (NARA)

Some of HMS *Duke of York*'s anti-aircraft guns are fired during the battleship's crossing of the Atlantic whilst conveying Churchill to the United States. (National Museum of the US Navy)

CHURCHILL TRAVELS TO THE UNITED STATES

Even as the ink on America's declaration of war against Japan was still drying, Churchill was setting out his intentions to travel across the Atlantic and begin the process of fortifying the UK's relationship with its new, and most important, ally.

"We could review the whole war plan in light of reality and new facts," Churchill wrote to Roosevelt. After expressing his concern regarding the British leader's safety in the U-boat-infested waters of the Atlantic – "a concern the prime minister waved off" notes one commentator – Roosevelt acquiesced. "Delighted to have you here at the White House," the president replied.

So, within days of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Churchill set off for the United States. At 11.00 hours on December 13, the Prime Minister and his party embarked on the newly commissioned battleship HMS *Duke of York* which was anchored off Greenock. With its VIP passengers safely aboard, *Duke of York*, along with an escort of three destroyers, steamed out of the Clyde at 15.00 hours the same day. The weather forecast was so bad, the decision was taken to initially head south through the Irish Sea towards the Azores.

For the next two days, *Duke of York* battled through a full-blown gale. So dismal were the conditions that the battleship was repeatedly forced to reduce speed so that her escorts could maintain their station. In *The Grand Alliance*, Volume 3 of his memoirs, Churchill later recalled the following regarding the voyage: "Everyone in our party worked incessantly while the *Duke of York* plodded westwards, and all our thoughts were focussed on the new and vast problems we had to solve. We looked forward with eagerness, but also some anxiety, to our first direct contact as allies with the President and his political and military advisors."

On the 21st, *Duke of York* rendezvoused with the three US Navy destroyers that would escort the battleship on the final leg of its journey – it arrived in Chesapeake Bay the following day. From there, the battleship proceeded to Norfolk Navy Yard, where Churchill and his party finally disembarked and travelled on to Washington by air.

On December 24, the British delegation began a series of meetings with their US counterparts. Lasting through into the middle of January 1942, these became known as the First Washington Conference, or, by referring to its codename, the Arcadia Conference.

This was arguably, for Britain at least, the most important of the wartime Allied conferences, for, among the many outcomes, it led to Roosevelt accepting a 'Germany First' policy. As General George C Marshall, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, noted, "Notwithstanding the entry of Japan into the war, our view is that Germany is still the prime enemy and her defeat is the key to victory". Despite American demands for immediate revenge against Japan, the basic course of the rest of World War Two had been mapped out.

WAKE ISLAND SURRENDERS

It was at around 07.00 hours on the morning of Monday, December 8, 1941, that word reached the tiny US garrison on the island of Wake that Pearl Harbor had been attacked. One of the most isolated locations in the world, Wake, along with the smaller and adjacent Peale and Wilkes islands, was nearly 600 miles from the nearest island – and even that was uninhabited.

Just ten minutes later, a force of 34 Japanese G3M2 Type 96 bombers lifted off from Roi in the Marshalls. They arrived over Wake just before noon; their bombs were soon raining down.

The Japanese bombers returned the following day, attacking from about 13,000ft at 11.45 hours. Though one of Wake's defending fighters, from Marine Fighting Squadron 211 (VMF-211), claimed a victory over one of the raiders, the Japanese had wreaked considerable havoc on the island, demolishing or badly damaging a number of buildings, including the hospital, a warehouse and a metal workshop.

Commanded by Rear Admiral Sadamichi Kajioka, a Japanese invasion force had set out from Kwajalein, in the Marshalls, on December 8. Despite an encounter with an American submarine, USS *Triton*, which fired a salvo of four torpedoes at 00.17 hours on December 11, the first torpedoes fired from a US Pacific Fleet submarine in World War Two, Kajioka's warships opened fire on Wake at 05.22 hours that same day.

However, Kajioka's forces suffered heavily, particularly as a result of the skilfully handled US coastal guns. His flagship, *Yubari*, was hit 11 times, while the destroyer *Hayate* was struck by three two-gun salvos at a distance of only 4,000 yards. The bombardment was so accurate that she blew up, broke in two, and immediately sank.

The Marines cheered so wildly at their work that Sergeant Henry Bedell hollered at his gunners: "Knock it off, you bastards, and get back on the guns. What d'ya think this is, a ball game?" The Marines had every reason to cheer, as *Hayate* was the first Japanese surface ship to be sunk during the war.

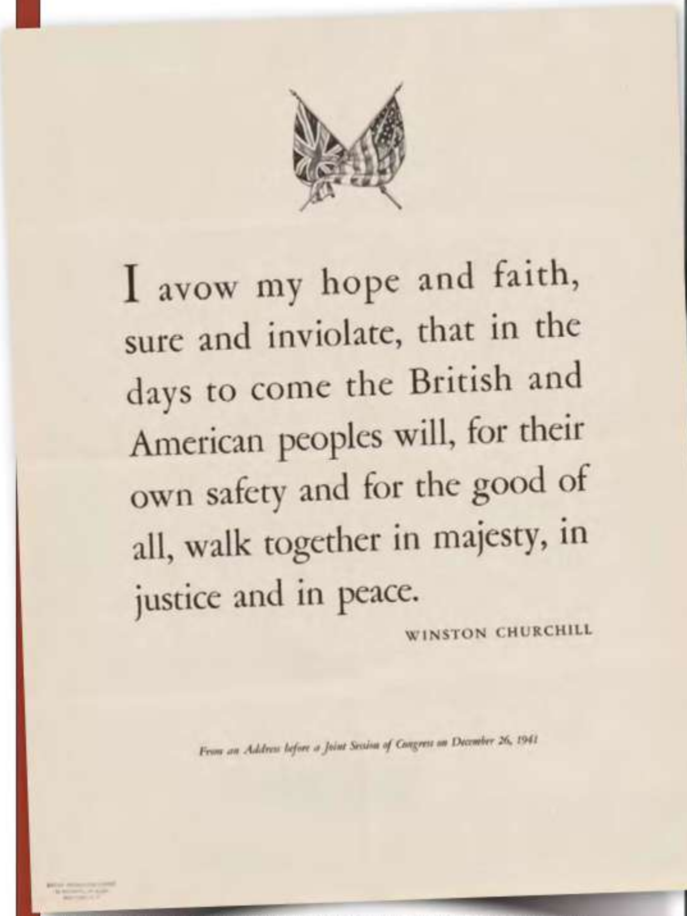
Wrecked Grumman F4F-3 Wildcat fighters of Marine Fighting Squadron 211 (VMF-211) lie abandoned by Wake's airstrip sometime after the Japanese captured the island in December 1941. (NARA)

Over the days that followed, the Japanese offensive against Wake continued. Then on the morning of December 21, Rear Admiral Kajioka again set out from the Marshalls for a second attempt at Wake. This time he and his men were better prepared, and had been reinforced, particularly with the addition of two aircraft carriers fresh from the attack on Pearl Harbor.

Following a preliminary bombardment, the Japanese landings began at 02.35 hours on December 23, when they beached two high speed transports (converted destroyers) and four landing craft on the shore. After a morning of intense fighting, during which many civilians and airmen volunteered to fight as infantry, and the American defenders undertook aggressive counterattacks, Wake's garrison was finally forced to surrender.

"The men of Wake had fought well," wrote the historian Robert Cressman, "impressing the victors with their tenacious bravery, which later proved to be inspiring, not only to the Marine Corps, but also to the nation as a whole".

Pan American Airways' compound on Pearl Island, Wake, as seen in March 1940. A hotel can be seen upper left. In about seven minutes of aerial attack on December 8, 1941, Japanese bombs and bullets totally wrecked these facilities, and the hotel set alight. (USNHHC)



I avow my hope and faith, sure and inviolate, that in the days to come the British and American peoples will, for their own safety and for the good of all, walk together in majesty, in justice and in peace.

WINSTON CHURCHILL

From an Address before a Joint Session of Congress on December 26, 1941

A poster produced in New York, by the British Information Services, an agency of the Ministry of Information, following the Prime Minister's speech. (NARA)

Winston Churchill speaking in the Senate Chamber on December 26, 1941. (Historic Military Press)

CHURCHILL ADDRESSES THE US CONGRESS

Shortly after noon on December 26, 1941, Winston Churchill stepped up to a lectern bristling with microphones to deliver another of the rousing speeches that he was famous for. The venue on this occasion was the Senate Chamber in the US Capitol; taking a break from the *Arcadia* meetings, Churchill had naturally seized upon the invitation to be the first British Prime Minister to ever address Congress.

Mindful of the significance of his speech, Churchill had spent a great deal of time over the festive period preparing. In *The Grand Alliance* Churchill later recalled the sight that greeted him in the Senate Chamber: "Inside the scene was impressive and formidable, and the great semicircular hall, visible to me through a grille of microphones, was thronged. I must confess that I felt quite at home, and more sure of myself that I had sometimes been in the House of Commons."

Churchill spoke for 30 minutes, his words ranging across a variety of subjects. Having begun by touching on his own Anglo-American parentage, the Prime Minister soon built up to a dramatic condemnation of Japan's aggression. "What kind of a people do they think we are?" he said. "Is it possible that they do not realize that we shall never cease to persevere against them until they have been taught a lesson which they and the world will never forget?"

As for Hitler and his forces, Churchill remarked: "I am so glad to be able to place before you, members of the Senate and of the House of Representatives, at this moment when you are entering the war, the proof that with proper weapons and proper organization, we are able to beat the life out of the savage Nazi."

Churchill concluded his address with these words: "I avow my hope and faith, sure and inviolate, that in the days to come the British and American peoples will, for their own safety and for the good of all, walk together in majesty, in justice and in peace." As the chamber resounded to thunderous applause, the British leader flashed those present his characteristic 'V for Victory' sign.

As would be expected, Churchill's speech was widely reported on in Britain. An editorial in the *Manchester Guardian*, for example, carried the following thoughts: "Mr Churchill has planted himself firmly in the affections of the American people. He already had their admiration, built up largely on his home broadcasts. In his little Christmas Eve address he touched warmer and more intimate springs, and in his magnificent speech to Congress yesterday he gave Americans one of his masterpieces of political eloquence."

Later that evening, Churchill, no doubt satisfied with his performance eventually retired to his suite in the White House. During the night, however, he was struck by a pain in his chest and arm – he had suffered a minor heart attack. Sir Charles Wilson, Churchill's personal physician, not wanting to concern him, simply told the Prime Minister that he had pushed himself too hard.

OPERATION ARCHERY

Having been appointed as Chief of the Combined Operations Headquarters on October 27, 1941, at which point he was promoted to Commodore, Lord Louis Mountbatten decided that a sizeable Commando raid was required to force Germany to deploy larger numbers of troops in Norway than would otherwise be the case. Though Churchill had favoured an attack on Trondheim, it was the Norwegian islands of Vaagso and Måløy that were selected as the targets for what became known as Operation *Archery*.

The attack was to be the first time that all three armed services combined in support of an amphibious raid against a defended coast. The date set for the operation was December 27, 1941. At 08.39 hours that day, HMS *Prince Charles* and HMS *Prince Leopold* lowered all of their landing craft which then moved off in formation about three minutes later. In little more than five minutes, the men of No.1 Group went ashore near the village of Hollevik. Their task was to clear the Halnoesvik area, where a German gun had been reported, and then, once complete, move along the coastal road to South Vaagso and form a reserve for No.2 Group unless ordered otherwise.

Whilst No.1 Group was going ashore, the landing craft carrying Nos. 2 and 3 groups were still making their way inshore. No.2 Group was to be landed near South Vaagso and then attack the town itself. No.3 Group, meanwhile, was to assault the town of Måløy, which is located on the south-eastern side of the island of Vaagso.

Lord Louis Mountbatten inspecting a number of Commandos before their departure to participate in Operation *Archery*. (Historic Military Press)

As they headed towards their targets, Nos. 2 and 3 groups were given covering fire by the cruiser HMS *Kenya*. The naval bombardment turned out to be so accurate that Lieutenant-Colonel J F Durnford-Slater, a veteran of Operation *Claymore* in March 1941 and who was in command of No.2 Group and the Senior Officer proceeding ashore, allowed the landing craft to approach to within 100 of the shore before sending up the "Cease Bombardment" signal.

As soon as this was given, a force of Hampden bombers, "showing great skill and dash", came in at an exceptionally low altitude to drop a number of smoke bombs – Operation *Archery* represented the first occasion that air support had been integrated into raiding plans from the outset. Because of these precautions, No.2 Group landed in the face of greatly reduced enemy fire, whilst No.3 Group did so entirely unopposed. Held offshore, No.4 Group acted as the reserve, while No.5 Group was landed just south of the village of North Vaagso.

As soon as they were ashore, the Commandos set about their tasks. The following description was provided by a Reuters correspondent embedded with No.2 Group during the attack: "I waded ashore with the rest, knee-deep through rocky pools and acrid fumes, onto ledges of snow. It was a weird and confusing experience, through which the Commando troops, led by dashing young officers and hard-bitten sergeants, emerged to begin a series of assaults through and around the narrow town from west to east…

Commandos in action during Operation *Archery*. (Danish National Museum)

"The officers of the troops concerned [then] gathered up their forces for the most desperate of all the tasks that short, swift day. They had to advance down the main street. One officer had slipped on getting out of the boat and jammed his leg between it and the rocks, but he struggled on, limping badly…

"Despite casualties, all ranks pursued their task with great gallantry, both before and after they were reinforced by a floating reserve [No.4 Group]. One man I saw fought brilliantly. He was the corporal who went with his captain to storm the hotel. After the officer had been shot, he managed to chuck a grenade into the building, which then caught fire… Resistance was particularly stubborn in the centre of town which, as the morning grew older, began to blaze as more and more houses holding snipers and small parties of the enemy came under heavy fire…

One of the wounded raiders is assisted back to a landing craft during the attack on December 27, 1941. (Historic Military Press)

"Demolition work was sometimes unavoidably risky owing to the closeness of the canning and oil factories to the fighting. I and several others had to duck rather hastily when the biggest of them was blown up, and a little later, when the only German tank in town, a small light model, was demolished in its garage. Pieces of the burning metal whistled past me up the street and wounded two of our men 200 yards away."

No.1 Group quickly achieved its tasks, and was then instructed to head south and link up with No.2 Group. No.3 Group, for its part, very quickly gained control of Måløy Island, "where those enemy troops who had not been killed by the Naval bombardment", noted a post-attack report, "were for the most part demoralised and dazed by its effect, and quickly surrendered".

No.5 Group "cratered the coast road between North and South Vaagso and [was] able to capture a number of prisoners… A fighting patrol, which was sent forward into North Vaagso directly the Group had landed, collected the chief Quisling, took over the telephone exchange and, before leaving, wrecked the instruments."

Looking down on the town of Måløy, which was attacked by the men of No.3 Group on December 27.

Lieutenant Denis O'Flaherty being helped through the snow to a dressing station during the Vaagso Raid. He had sustained an injury that resulted in the loss of an eye. O'Flaherty remained in the army and eventually became a brigadier. (via Historic Military Press)

An oil factory burns in Vaagso, after being attacked by the Commandos, on December 27, 1941. British troops can be seen on the quay in the foreground. (via Historic Military Press)

As evidenced by the Reuters correspondent's account, it was the men of No.2 Group who bore the brunt of the fighting on December 27: "From the start, [they had] encountered very stiff opposition, both from German infantry who fought to the last man in the buildings in which they were established, and from snipers, armed often with automatic rifles, who took up positions on the hillside."

By 14.00 hours, however, the Commandos began implementing their withdrawal. As the *Combined Operations* website notes, Operation *Archery* resulted in the "successful destruction of coastal defences, oil and fish factories, radio transmitters, stores, a lighthouse, a power station, 9 merchant ships, totalling 15,000 tons, and four Heinkels. 30,000 additional German troops [were subsequently] deployed to the Norwegian sector, taken from other fronts, but notably the Atlantic Wall. 150 Germans killed, 98 captured and 71 Norwegians took passage to the UK." Mountbatten, it would seem, had achieved his aim.

THE SIEGE OF CORREGIDOR BEGINS

Though Lieutenant General Homma's troops were advancing steadily through the Philippines, the most valuable prize of all, Manila Bay, still eluded them. For centuries, the island fortress of Corregidor had guarded the approaches to Manila, and as long as it remained in American hands, the use of the finest natural harbour in the Orient was, for the time being, denied to the Japanese.

Though it is only three-and-a-half miles long and one-and-a-half miles at its widest point, Corregidor could boast an impressive 23 coastal batteries, mounting a total of 56 guns. It would prove a tough nut for Homma's men to crack.

Despite the fighting on the nearby Bataan Peninsula to the north of Manila Bay, it was not until December 29, 1941, that the Japanese finally turned their attention to Corregidor. Three days earlier, General MacArthur, Philippine President Manuel L Quezon, and Francis B Sayre, the US High Commissioner to the Philippines, and their staffs were moved to the relative safety of the island.

At 11.54 hours on the 29th, 18 enemy bombers *appeared over the island and targeted* the various US headquarters buildings and barracks. Escorted by 19 fighters, the bombers approached Corregidor at an altitude of 15,000 feet and in regular V formation. The flight broke into smaller formations, of nine and three aircraft, which passed lengthwise over the island, then back, dropping 225lb and 550lb bombs on the headquarters buildings and barracks.

A US Marine Corps Sergeant on Corregidor explains the use of the Lewis machine-gun to a group of Filipino soldiers. The number of personnel on the island by late 1941 was around 13,000, of whom a little less than 2,000 were civilians. (NARA)

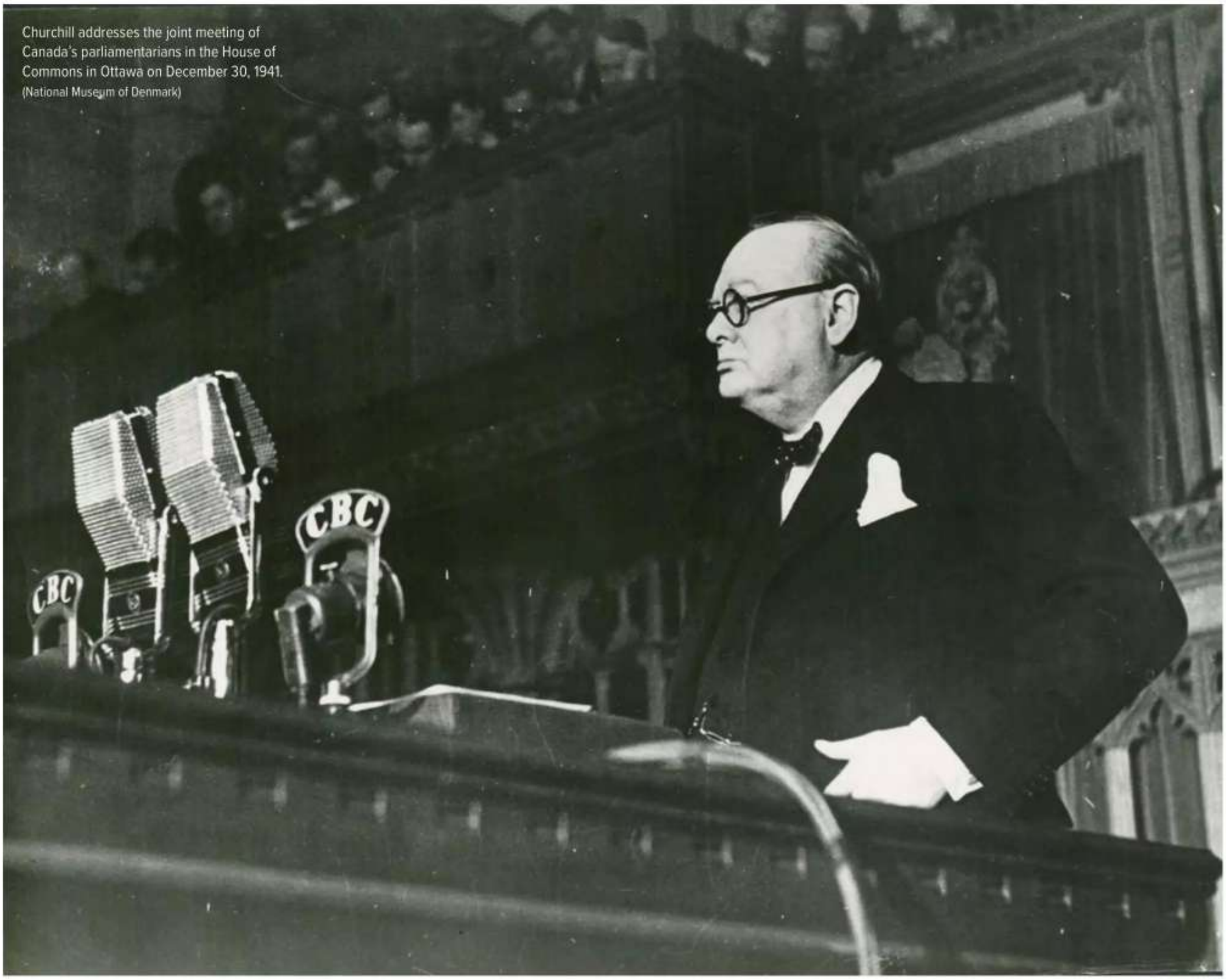
First Lieutenant Sidney F Jenkins, with the 4th Marines, remembered the "bombs screaming to earth with shattering explosions, the crack of AA guns, the neat 'plop plop' of the AA shells bursting all over the sky… There we were, the whole regiment flat on our bellies on the lower deck of Middleside Barracks."

The attack lasted for thirty minutes, during which time almost 50 bombs were dropped – and there were more to come. Half an hour later, Japanese aircraft returned to continue the aerial bombardment. In the two hours that the attack lasted, the Japanese unloaded approximately 60 tons of bombs on the island. MacArthur himself was wounded during the bombing, when "a piece of rock struck the General in the shoulder and one faithful orderly was wounded in the hand".

Fortunately, the main American defensive structures had escaped relatively unscathed, but the barracks and the headquarters building, amongst many others, were badly damaged. Major Achille Tisdelle recalled that after the raid the area known as Bottomside appeared to be "one huge mass of jagged and bent sheet iron". The Japanese had not got away scot-free, however, with the anti-aircraft gunners bringing down 13 heavy bombers and four dive bombers.

The attackers returned intermittently throughout the course of the following few days, but with operations elsewhere in the Philippines demanding Homma's undivided attention, and the greater part of his resources, it was not until January 2, 1942, that the Siege of Corregidor was resumed in earnest. The garrison defiantly held out until May 1942.

Japanese Army Mitsubishi Ki-21 *Sally* bombers are pictured during a sortie over Corregidor. (USNHHC)



Churchill addresses the joint meeting of Canada's parliamentarians in the House of Commons in Ottawa on December 30, 1941. (National Museum of Denmark)

"AN ELECTRIFYING ADDRESS"

Still in North America, Winston Churchill, undaunted by the question mark still hanging over his health, decided to undertake a train journey north to Canada. He headed to Ottawa, arriving there on December 29. Having been given an "enthusiastic welcome by great crowds", as one British reporter noted, his first task was to attend a meeting of the Canadian War Cabinet that same afternoon.

However, it was the next day, December 30, that Churchill carried out his primary duty in Canada when he addressed a joint meeting of Canada's parliamentarians in the House of Commons. He was the first non-Canadian to be conferred with such an opportunity.

Having acknowledged the warm greeting he had been given, Churchill went on talk of the vital, and growing, part that Canada was playing in the Allied war effort. It was, many stated, a "stirring speech": "We [in Britain] are most grateful for all you have done in the common cause, and we know that you are resolved to do whatever more is possible as the need arises and as opportunity serves. Canada, Sir, occupies a unique position in the British Empire because of its unbreakable ties with Britain and its ever-growing friendship and intimate association with the United States.

"Canada is a potent magnet, drawing together those in the new world and in the old whose fortunes are now united in a deadly struggle for life and honour against the common foe. The contribution of Canada to the Imperial war effort in troops, in ships, in aircraft, in food, and in finance has been magnificent."

Despite his optimistic tones, Churchill made it clear to the Canadian parliamentarians that he was under no illusion as to the difficulties that the Allies faced, especially in light of Japan's recent entry into the war. "There will be no halting, or half measures, there will be no compromise, or parley," he continued. "These gangs of bandits have sought to darken the light of the world, have sought to stand between the common people of all the lands and their march forward into their inheritance. They shall themselves be cast into the pit of death and shame, and only when the earth has been cleansed and purged of their crimes and of their villainies will we turn from the task which they have forced upon us, a task which we were reluctant to undertake, but which we shall now most faithfully and punctiliously discharge.

"Mr. Speaker, this is no time, according to my sense of proportion, this is no time to speak of the hopes of the future, or of the broader world which lies beyond our struggles and our victory. We have to win that world for our children. We have to win it by our sacrifices."

CHURCHILL'S NEW YEAR MESSAGE

Following his speech to the joint meeting of Canada's parliamentarians in the House of Commons in Ottawa, on the morning of December 31, Churchill gave a press conference at Government House. Then, on the final evening of 1941, Churchill set out to return to Washington D.C. and a resumption of his discussions with Roosevelt.

Boarding his special train, in fact Roosevelt's private railroad car, again at Ottawa, the Prime Minister was soon heading back to the United States – the train departed at 15.00 hours. Churchill reflected on the two important speeches that he had given in Washington and Ottawa. "I was lucky in the timing," he noted, before going on to write the following in his memoirs: "They came at the moment when we could all rejoice at the creation of the Grand Alliance, with its overwhelming potential force, and before the cataract of ruin fell upon us from the long, marvellously prepared assault of Japan.

"Even while I spoke in confident tones, I could feel in anticipation the lashes which were soon to score our naked flesh. Fearful forfeits had to be paid not only by Britain and Holland but by the United States, in the Pacific and Indian Oceans, and in all the Asiatic lands and islands they lap with their waves. An indefinite period of military disaster lay certainly before us. Many dark and weary months of defeat and loss must be endured before the light would come again."

As the Prime Minister's train sped on, the final minutes of 1941 ticked by. The author Richard M Langworth, Senior Fellow at Hillside College Churchill Project, has described what happened during that journey: "Soon it [the train] was steaming southward on New York Central's broad tracks along the Hudson. Appropriately close to Roosevelt's home at Hyde Park, the Prime Minister called staff and reporters to the dining car. He wanted in a few words to 'cast some forward light upon the dark, inscrutable mysteries of the future'.

"Of course, he would voice confidence in the certainty of victory. He would not minimize the challenges or forecast when deliverance might come. That would depend 'on our exertions, upon our achievements, and on the hazardous and uncertain course of the war'."

As Churchill entered the dining carriage, he was greeted by rousing cheers and applause. The Prime Minister, seizing the moment, raised his glass to the gathered company. "It was with no illusions," he subsequently wrote, "that I wished them all a glorious New Year".

As the reporters scribbled down every word, Churchill made the following declaration: "Here's to 1942. Here's to a year of toil – a year of struggle and peril, and a long step forward towards victory. May we all come through safe and with honour!"

Known as *The Roaring Lion*, this famous portrait of Churchill was taken by Yousuf Karsh in the chambers of Speaker of the House of Commons of Canada just after Churchill had delivered his speech on December 30, 1941. (Library and Archives Canada)

NATIONS UNITED

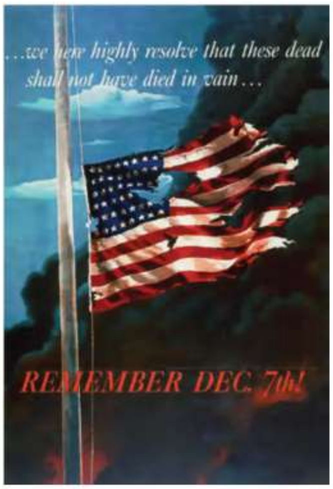
On New Year's Day 1942, in what could only be described as "dreary weather", President Franklin Roosevelt and Prime Minister Winston Churchill drove from the White House to the historic Christ Church in nearby Alexandria, Virginia. The US government had declared a National Day of Prayer to mark America's entry into the war.

The two leaders sat side-by-side in George Washington's pew. After a while, the pair broke out into song and together sang *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*. During the service, both men must have found the time to contemplate the epoch-changing events that the world had experienced during the preceding 12 months, as well as how these might play out in the weeks, months, and years to come.

That evening at the White House, Roosevelt, Churchill, and the Soviet and Chinese envoys, as well as representatives from 22 other nations, signed a short document which would later come to be known as the 'United Nations Declaration'. The governments that signed this agreement affirmed that the Allies were fighting because they were convinced that "complete victory over their enemies is essential to defend life, liberty, independence, and religious freedom".

To achieve that victory, however, there were still many defeats to be endured, and many victories to celebrate. Indeed, for both Britain and America, 1942 started with bad news. For the former there was, of course, the fall of Singapore, the largest British surrender in history, and which Churchill referred to as the "worst disaster". The United States, meanwhile, was forced to retreat from the Philippines and abandon its island fortress of Corregidor – though the Americans quickly declared their intent by striking at the very heart of Japan in the Doolittle Raid in April 1942.

Among the other key events of 1942 were the Battle of El Alamein in North Africa, the disastrous scattering of Convoy PQ-17 in the war at sea, the Dieppe Raid in Europe, and the Battle of Midway in the Pacific – the latter providing a graphic illustration of America's military and industrial might. The grinding war on the Eastern Front also failed to yield the decisive victory that Hitler had sought. If 1941 had been the year in which the war had become truly global, then it could be argued that 1942 was the one in which events started to tilt irrevocably in the Allies' favour.


…we here highly resolve that these dead
shall not have died in vain…
REMEMBER DEC. 7th!

"Remember Dec. 7th!" – a recruitment poster published in 1942, evoking memories of the Pearl Harbor attack. (NARA)

Hitler and other senior Nazi Party officials at the Reichstag, December 11, 1941. (Historic Military Press)

General Erwin Rommel with a group of Afrika Korps and Italian Army officers at an observation post during the fighting at Sidi Aziz near Tobruk, December 1941. (Historic Military Press)

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